

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Chris Davila. She is a communications and PR freelancer, storyteller and the creator of [Girl Takes Mundo](#), a Latina travel blog that empowers Latinas to explore the world fearlessly. Born and raised in Chicago with Guatemalan roots, she now travels the world from her base in the UK. Through [Girl Takes Mundo](#), she partners with international travel brands to monetize her travels while providing expert insights, travel resources and free guides to help others do the same. She has been located vacation independent since 2017, and she now has been to over 80 countries.

Chris, welcome to the show.

Chris Davila: Thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

Matt Bowles: I am super excited to have you here tonight and I am especially excited because you and I have agreed to make this a wine night. So, let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are and what we are drinking. I am in the Blue Ridge mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, and I have just opened a red wine from the Loire Valley in France. This is a hundred percent gamay so I will be drinking through this evening. But where are you tonight, Chris, and what are you drinking?

Chris Davila: So, I am currently in Windy City enjoying summertime shy in Chicago where my family is from. So currently visiting family and I'm enjoying a Baronía, which was actually the Latino Travel Fest wine sponsor. Gonzalez Baez was their wine sponsor, and so I picked up a bottle because I love their Rioja. Also, I really like the story of Baronía, which I think was perfect for today's podcast. So, they're foodie enthusiasts, and they said this wine was born among friends, to be shared among friends. And I thought, what better way than who better to share it than with you?

Matt Bowles: That is absolutely perfect. I love that context. And by the way, I was also born in the Chicagoland area, in Arlington Heights, in the northwest suburbs. I moved when I was very young, when I was 2 but that is the roots. So, we do have the Chicago connection. And as you mentioned, we were both just hanging out together in Chicago at the Latino Travel Fest. Maverick Show listeners, of course, know [Vanessa Fondeur](#), the amazing founder of Latino Travel Fest, who has been on the podcast and has been a dear friend of mine for many years. But you were a featured speaker at the fest this year, and it was your first time actually attending, even though I know you've been connected with the community for a while. So, what was the experience like at Latino Travel Fest?

Chris Davila: It honestly was amazing. I had always been following the community. I had been wanting to make my schedules work to be able to attend one of these conferences, and the opportunity finally came. But I also was able to speak at the conference. It was just really emotional for me because it was something that I had set as a goal, to finally speak at a conference. I've traveled for so many years. I've started to monetize, finally, this little hobby that I had about sharing my experiences, wanting to share with Latinas how to travel, to use myself as an example. But as a result of what started, something so small has evolved into something so much bigger. And to be able to finally speak about it on a platform where I was with my community, where I was able to see the spaces of the people who I wanted to impact, was just really powerful.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to give folks a little bit of context on you and your background story. But before we even talk about your story, can you talk about where in Guatemala your parents are from and what their life was like there, and then talk a little bit about their immigration journey to the U.S.

Chris Davila: So, my dad is from the capital, and my mom is from what we would consider a suburb. It's about 45 minutes away from the capital. It's this little town called San Antonio La Paz. And the irony is that my dad is from Barrio San Antonio in the capital so little village and then a neighborhood named the same. My dad came from a working family. He was working as a vendor and had his own business selling different products to different stores in Guatemala. And he said that the reason why he decided to immigrate was because a lot of gangs were coming. People were asking for bribes to allow him to continue to sell and have his business, and he felt it was way too dangerous. So, he was given this opportunity to be able to get a visa to move to the States, and he took it.

My mom, they had already met. She heard that he was thinking about heading to the States, and she's like, I'm coming with. She moved, interestingly enough, a month earlier, she didn't get a visa, so she did immigrate the illegal way. And I've heard that story, and it is really powerful to hear that my mother was willing to take the risk on her own, make this happen. And then a month later, my dad took a road trip, and he had his visa. He came to Chicago. They both met up in Chicago and started what became their life here and started their family.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit, then about your experience growing up in Chicago and what it was like navigating your American identity, living in Chicago, your Guatemalan identity, coming from an immigrant home. What was that like for you as you came up in Chicago?

Chris Davila: I think it was definitely navigating the waters and trying to understand what made me American and what made me Guatemalan. I am really thankful to this day for the efforts that my parents made in making sure that my sisters and I really embraced our Guatemalan heritage. So, we were attending Guatemalan events. We only spoke Spanish, and we were only allowed to speak Spanish in our household. Our first language was Spanish, but then it meant we had to learn a new language. When we got to school, and there were struggles there, we found ourselves playing with the translators, helping act as accountants, and X, Y, and Z.

I remember being the one that was helping my dad when he was testing to get his citizenship. And I was asking him all the questions, and we would sit down, and I was probably only 7 or 8 years old, but I think I was ready for my own test by the time I got to eighth grade, which I think was a requirement in the U.S. Because I had already known all these questions by helping my dad. So, it definitely was a lot of navigating, figuring out what made me Guatemalan, what was more American. But I really thanked my parents for, to this day, still helping me become this Guatemalan American. And I say Guatemalan American because I do feel more Guatemalan than American.

Matt Bowles: And can you talk about your trips back to the homeland? How young were you when you remember going back to Guatemala? How often did you do that and what was your relationship and connection with the country like?

Chris Davila: I have so many memories from Guatemala from an early age. And I think some of my earliest memories as a child are actually in Guatemala. I remember to this day, I think I might have been four or five years old. We did a road trip, just my parents and myself, to Guatemala. And I remember that it fell on my birthday. And so, on my birthday I'm at my uncle's house and they start playing Las Mañanitas, which is the birthday song that you get in a Latin speaking country. And I just remember hitting the wall because I was so startled by how loud Las Mañanitas were playing. And from then on, we traveled all the time. It was one of those very yearly pilgrimages, as you would say. We would spend summers there. We would go and

spend Christmas. And so, I felt so connected. I still feel very connected with Guatemala. Even when I travel, I will mostly say to people that I'm from Guatemala. And then when they're like, but your accent. I'm like, but I was born in America.

For me, growing up, I was from Guatemala. First, I had pen pals. And that's how I learned how to write and speak even more in Español. Because my mom made sure that in the town that she was from that we had little friends. And so, she would have us write letters to them. And she intentionally made us write letters in Spanish as young girls. And she would proofread them for us and then she'd mail them and then we'd get letters back from our friends from her child. And so, I think my parents really helped build that connection and those roots in Guatemala. When we were in Guatemala, we would travel to different places. So, it wasn't just us staying in our parents' neighborhood or village. My parents were also lovers of travel. So, they would make sure we would go to all these different places in Guatemala. And I think that it really helped us appreciate the country we were from because we got to actually enjoy that country as well.

Matt Bowles: This is going to sound crazy, but I have not yet been to Guatemala, which is totally crazy and totally inappropriate. I have spent a month in El Salvador. I have been to Nicaragua multiple times. Guatemala is super high on my list, as it should. But for me and other people that have not yet experienced Guatemala and would like to come and would like to spend quality time immersing in the country, what would you recommend? What would you put us onto? How should we come and experience the country? And a lot of digital nomads listen to this, who can come and post up for like a month or so and work remotely. So, what would be your advice?

Chris Davila: So, my advice would be to skip the capital. I would say it has highlights, but the true beauty, as we all know, is outside of a capital. It's the other places that are a bit farther to reach. But you don't even have to go too far when you land in Guatemala City. I recommend people go to Antigua, which is the old capital. It's colonial, it's become more tourists, but it honestly is really beautiful. And I think it's a really great way for people to integrate themselves into Guatemala. For what Guatemala is, it's only a 45-minute journey, which is about the same time that would get you into the capital anyway. So, I would say go to Antigua first. It's a really great example of what Guatemala has to offer. The second thing I'd say is rent a car if you have the ability to do, because it's going to give you an insane amount of freedom to be able to visit all these places at ease.

So, you can easily see volcanoes in Antigua. You can go and see black beaches in El Paredon. You can go and spend time on the volcanic lake which is La Guatiflan and hang out in one of the multiple little villages that surround the lake. You can hang out in the jungle if you want in Tikal. I know everybody wants to go to Tikal when they're in Guatemala to see the Mayan ruins. That is a bit farther. So, for that I always tell people to make a flight from the capital to Tikal. It's about an hour flight. There are multiple flights that happen throughout the day, really early morning ones and then really late in the evenings. So realistically, if you were short on time, you can take a flight super early in the morning. They have a day tour that is offered and then you can do the evening flight to come back. But I would recommend doing at least one overnight so you can actually enjoy Flores, be able to see more of Tikal. But I would say that's my advice for Guatemala. And I definitely think you need to be visiting. That should become very top priority based on not just myself, because I know I'm biased, but the amount of people that whenever I say I'm from Guatemala and they're like, Guatemala, that's the best place that I've ever visited. And I'm like, "I know 100%".

Matt Bowles: And Maverick Show listeners know as well that I've had many guests on that have raved about it and it's super high on my list. So, I will definitely be hitting you up when I plan that trip for sure. I

want to ask you also, Chris, just thinking back, how did your interest in what world travel to other places besides Guatemala and other cultures, how did that start to develop?

Chris Davila: This goes back to my parents. They were lovers of travel as well, and they really made it a priority to make travel something that was realistic for our family. So, we would do road trips to California and road trips to, to D.C. Michigan, Vegas, and then there was always the trips to Guatemala. And one thing that I always get really sentimental now as an adult is that I didn't realize until later that my dad would clear his 401k every time, he did his trips to make sure that we would have at least one big trip every year. And to me I'm like, I know what clearing a 401k every year would mean, but I also respect how passionate he felt about travel and the importance of it. And then aside from that, I feel like I always had that little travel bug of exploring beyond what I was being shown. I remember spending way too long in the library looking at books that had all these travel locations, creating books for myself, which probably are now the travel guides that I create. But I remember creating books that would have pictures of Cairo and France, of all these places I wanted to see, which made me further fall in love with this idea of travel. And I was already creating my little bucket list.

Matt Bowles: So can you talk a little bit then also just about your professional career trajectory and what ultimately led up to what I want to ask you about next, which is going to be the sabbatical that you took from your career in 2017. But prior to that, take us a little bit on your professional trajectory.

Chris Davila: I'm a jack of all trades and so my trajectory has always been around communication and marketing in different forms. So, I started doing radio and studied at Paul University in Chicago for marketing and communications with a focus on PR advertising and I also did a minor in commercial Spanish but was doing radio on the side as my job for a Latino radio station here in Chicago. I was doing traffic reports, so I was a traffic girl. Then I went to a non-for-profit radio station and started doing marketing for them where I was doing events, I was doing social media, the works. I found myself then going corporate and started working with Red Bull. I did market there and started to dabble into PR with them as well.

And then during all of this time, I was the girl who was trying to maximize my travel days. I was figuring out how many travel days I could get if I took the holidays, did this, and then decided that I was no different than people who were European, who I used to meet while I was already solo traveling, where they would say, oh, I've traveling for a month, I'm traveling for three months. And I think that little bug started to get to me because I felt like I was no different than them. I have savings, I'm young, my family, and my parents are still very healthy. The only thing that is stopping me is my love for working at Red Bull. And I kind of felt a bit disgusted, quite frankly, that I had fallen into this corporate America mindset that the only reason why I wasn't taking a sabbatical was because I loved my job. That sounded really silly to me, and I think that's kind of what ended up catapulting the sabbatical into fruition.

Matt Bowles: So, let's talk about this. You then designed a 18-month long, six continent sabbaticals. And I want to talk through some of the highlights of that.

Chris Davila: I originally planned six months for my sabbatical and then I think after month two, I was like, actually there's two things that are going to happen at this point. I'm going to either travel until I get tired of it, or travel until I run out of money. And so, what started as a six month sabbatical turned into a very long sabbatical of over a year and some change.

Matt Bowles: I love that. So, you decided to start in Europe. What were some of the highlights of the European portion? And tell me about your experience in the country of Sweden, because I have not been there yet.

Chris Davila: Sweden was amazing. I strategically made Sweden happen during summer solstice to be able to celebrate and see the longest sunny day in the place where it's supposed to be sunny the longest. So, it was very strategic. I also had friends from Sweden that I had met in Prague a year earlier, also through solo traveling, because as we all know, you don't actually travel by yourself. You find people. I made friends in Prague, and they invited me to Summer Solstice. So, I was there. We went to a lake house from one of my friends and I got told that most likely Benny from ABBA will be at the summer solstice celebration. My mother had me growing up with ABBA, so I was freaking out.

And I was also told, don't freak out. He obviously doesn't want that. I had to compose myself, but it was super surreal to tell myself I'm on my sabbatical. I'm now celebrating summer solstice in Sweden, seeing the large pole, people dancing around it, and ABBA is right under it playing his accordion while I'm dancing with a flower crown that was made by us who picked flowers in Sweden. It was just so surreal. And of course, I snapped a little video and shared it with my mom and was like, mom, you're never going to believe where I am and who I'm with. Yeah, just purely magical. That was definitely one of the highlights in Europe, for sure.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about the South America portion of your trip, because Chile is one of my very favorite countries. I've spent about a month or so based in Santiago, and I've been in Valparaíso, and I have seen that portion. I have not been to Easter Island, and I will say I did actually look into the trip and Easter Island, although it is a Chilean island, it is incredibly far from mainland Chile for people that have never heard of Easter Island and have no idea what I'm talking about. Can you explain why, what Easter Island is, where it is, and then what your experience was like there.

Chris Davila: Easter Island, I agree with you. It doesn't feel like Chile at all because it is so far away. It has Moai statues. It's very untouched. There's not that many people. I don't know historically how it became part of Chile, but it's part of these islands. I would say probably right in the middle between Hawaii and Chile. And I ended up solo camping in Easter Island. It felt like one of those places that had been untouched. There was only a very small city, and you could visit the island. I ended up renting a quad bike while I was there. And you could visit the island and do it in an hour and do the whole circle. These statues were just so intact. There were no tourists either. It felt like the tourists that were there. It was very intentional. I remember that they warned me that it would be very expensive to buy food there.

So, in Chile, I stacked up, and there's like a picture in my website, girtakesmundo.com that I show how big my luggage was because I brought food that I could end up eating. I'm on a budget. Even though I'm going to Easter Island. I'm like, I got to figure this out. But the people were amazing. It felt so isolated. It did feel like I was exploring the island, for the first time, it did have this energy and honestly, it was insane. I dropped my phone while I was exploring and I remember realizing, I'm like, okay, I'm on my quad bike. I've dropped my phone somewhere. So, I went and retraced my steps and was on the quad bike going back and I just saw these two farmers in the distance waving at me. And I'm like, they must know something. And they had picked up my phone and clearly the phone meant nothing to them. And they handed me my phone back and I'm like, nowhere in another country would somebody go out of their way to wave me down and be like, here's your phone.

Yeah, I loved Easter Island. I'm the type of person that likes to add places that I think are going to be hard for people to go to. And those are the places I want to go to. So, Easter Island was one of them. Madagascar was another one as well, where I'm like, I'm going to find a way, even if I'm doing it by myself as a Latina solo traveler again. If I could do it, anybody could do it.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about your experience in Bolivia, because I spent only eight nights in Bolivia, but it was one of the most memorable, unbelievable, game changing travel experiences I have ever had. And, and I recommend to people all the time, like, if you have a week and you could go anywhere on the continent of South America, I tell people Bolivia will blow your mind. And so anytime people have been to Bolivia, I always love to ask about their experiences and what it was like. So, when you went, where did you go in Bolivia and what was your experience like?

Chris Davila: I agree with you. Bolivia will definitely blow your mind. I wasn't expecting, expecting much from Bolivia, to be completely honest. I kind of used it as a stopover to make my way up and I'm like, oh, Bolivia. But it was definitely magical. I visited Salar de Uyuni, and I feel like the pictures are amazing. If you go and Google Salar de Uyuni, you're going to be blown away by the images, but it's even better in person. And I didn't think that that could be the case. There's a picture of me that one of my friends who I met while traveling and staying in the hostel took a picture of me and I'm literally laying on the salt face down, and you just see this isolated, empty Salar de Uyuni and I'm just taking it all in, feeling the salt in my face. And I wasn't aware he took the picture. I can still remember how I felt while that was happening and how I'm like, I just wanted to be so close to the ground, to feel it. And then there was a picture that came out of it because he clearly snapped it. It's an amazing country and I agree with you. If you have a week, you can do a good amount of visiting in Bolivia.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And for folks that are not at all familiar with this, Salar de Uyuni are the world's largest salt food flats. And if you can go there, there is really, I would just describe it as otherworldly landscape that I have never seen anywhere else on the planet, on any continent, anywhere, ever. You will see everything from these unbelievable salt flats, as you mentioned, which at sunsets and all of the depth perception photos and tricks you can do and things like that. But then if you do like a three-night tour in and around that area, you will also see, right. Rainbow colored mountains and red colored lagoons with flamingos standing in them and volcanic rock formations. And each day it just feels like you're on another planet. And by the time you leave, the landscape is just so extraordinary. And of course, the people are just amazing. And the capital, La Paz, is incredible. And cable cars are the way that regular people get around because it's built into the side of a mountain. And you're just like, what is my life right now? This is crazy. And they're super high-quality cable cars too. They're like built by the company that did the cable cars in the Swiss Alps, those gondolas. You know, what is even happening? I mean, I was just. Bolivia just blew me away every single day.

Chris Davila: Absolutely. In my mind. I also felt the cable cars had to be that well-built because walking is also a workout in and of itself. They need them to be high tech, those cable cars, 100%.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also now, of course, have to ask you about your trip to Colombia because I know that there is a very special story associated with this trip to Colombia that I want you to tell, if you will.

Chris Davila: Absolutely. Yeah. Colombia definitely changed my life and pivoted where I am today for sure. That's where I met my now husband in Medellin. Even though I kicked and fought because I didn't want this Eat, Pray Love story to happen, the amount of times when I was on my sabbatical and people would be

like, oh, so you're on an Eat, Pray Love journey? And I'm like, why is it that women have to be on A journey to find themselves and to be looking for something. No man gets asked, oh, why are you traveling? Are you trying to Eat Pray Love? And so, I used to be so annoyed by it, and I used to be like, I'm not on an Eat Pray Love journey. And then I found myself finding somebody that could potentially put me on an Eat Pray Love journey. And I was not happy. But I also really liked him a lot. So, yes, in Colombia, we met.

We started to travel together. We went to Cartagena, we did Minca, Santa Martha, etc. Just. It was amazing. I extended my time in Colombia so much. Kept canceling trips or rescheduling them because I wanted to spend more time with my now husband, and I wanted to see more of Colombia because I had fallen in love with Colombia. To this day, both me and him say that we would move to Colombia without question. It's one of those places where we could easily see ourselves living there. We don't know if it's the rose-tinted glasses that we clearly were in that honeymoon phase, but were definitely one of those iconic, very memorable sabbatical locations for me.

Matt Bowles: And then how did the story progress? You did not want the Eat Pray Love story. You did not want it to happen. And so how did things unfold?

Chris Davila: I ran away, Matt. I ran away. I pretty much said, at a certain point, I don't like what I'm feeling, so I'm going to leave. And he was like, go ahead, do it. So, I went to Nicaragua. I traveled through Nicaragua. I then decided to go to Guatemala, but he was still kind of sliding into the GMs, checking in on me. And then in Guatemala, I drank too much of the wine one night, and he was asking about where he should go next, and he was still in Colombia. And he's like, maybe Ecuador. Or he's like, maybe I will go and visit you. And I was supposed to leave three days after the first night that I arrived in Guatemala because I had already pushed back my trip. And I was like, well, I've been to Guatemala so many times. I don't need to spend that much time. And I spent way too much time in Colombia. So, I was like, no, I'm going to go and cut it short.

And then he started asking these questions. There was too much wine in my cup. And I was like, actually, maybe you come to Guatemala, and if you come, I'll stay longer. I looked up a flight, and I was like, you can actually get here by lunchtime tomorrow and we can have lunch together. And this man, five hours later was on a flight to go to Guatemala to see me, to have lunch with me. And I was like, well, I guess this means I have to hold my end of the bargain. And so, I stayed longer, and we road tripped through Guatemala for two weeks, visiting all these different places. Even though I had traveled so much with my family, I think I felt still that I had always seen it through a very Latin, Guatemalan perspective.

So, this made me feel like I was exploring it as a tourist and visiting more locations that probably my parents hadn't had the chance to share with me or just different places that we hadn't been able to see. But then we also got to visit a few of my family members along the way. And I just remember getting calls and messages from my mom, particularly my mom being like, I hear there's a guy you're traveling with. What's going on, Chris? And I'm like, he's a friend, Mom. Little did we know this friend was actually going to become my husband. But yeah, we did Guatemala together. He got to meet my Guatemalan family before he met my real family. Yeah. It's insane.

Matt Bowles: I love that story. Thank you for sharing that. Well, you did mention in passing that you ended up going to Madagascar. I know you spent some time traveling around the continent. I've spent about two and a half years and me. The continent of Africa. Dearly, dearly love it. I have not yet been to Madagascar. So, tell me please, Chris, what was your experience like in Madagascar?

Chris Davila: It was very humbling and very transformative. So, I ended up deciding that because of the language barrier, the fact that Madagascar is so super big, I did hire a driver to take me around. It was probably a big splurge, but a part of me felt like one of my big bucket list items was to visit Madagascar. I was just blown by the documentary. I believe it was Disney that did the documentary about Madagascar. And I was just like; this is a place I want to see. I want to go to a place that no one can reach, that has all this exotic wildlife. I needed to be there. And so, I was like, yes, I'm probably already, budgetwise, going to take a leap. But I'm like, I have to do it. This is a once in a lifetime experience. And so, I hired a private driver. He drove me around for 10 days. And we visited many different places in Madagascar. So, we got to see the lemurs and we got to go to these different activities because he was local, and we started to get to know each other. I was invited to meet his family in some of the places in these towns that we were visiting.

But one of the things that really took me by surprise, that I didn't think I actually expected, was these small villages that we were driving through where they didn't have electricity. They didn't know what a phone was or Wi-Fi or laptop top. And they were just living off the land. They were sleeping in these makeshift tents, and this was their life, and they were happy. And it made me think, even to this day, I still say to people, there is people in Madagascar who literally are living off the land and don't even own a phone. And they're happy and they wake up when the sun wakes up. They go to sleep when the sun is down. They are living right next to the beach in a tent, and they're able to do that without all of these luxuries, and they're living an amazing life. And so, for me, I think it's really kind of transformed me because it still makes me think, we don't need all of this.

We can still have an amazing, beautiful life with all of these things that we think are essential. And so, even though Madagascar was amazing and they have the best pineapple, they literally sell it on the sides of the roads. You just see these pineapples, and they're the best pineapple I've ever had. But aside from that and seeing this, wildlife, for me, was seeing how the people were living and how they were still living an amazing life. My driver was saying that people will walk for hours, or their meals are rice and fish. And it was just really transformative. I think I ended up finally when I went back to the capital and thought to myself, I guess this means I'm going back to the real world. Because it didn't feel like I was in the real world when I was traveling through Madagascar.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing. I want to go so badly. So that's another one I'm going to hit you up on when I start to plan that trip. Well, I know that you then subsequently went back to Europe for the summer and you decided to do the running with the bulls in Spain, in Pamplona. For people that are maybe are not familiar with this at all and don't have context on it, can you explain what it is and then what made you decide that you wanted to try to do this?

Chris Davila: Running with the bulls is a very traditional experience. In Pamplona, they will have this yearly festival that happens in July where for 10 days, they have the bulls in Pamplona run into the stadium every morning. But there's professional runners, then there's the Spanish runners, and then there's tourists that are able to also join and do the run. And the point of it is that you will hear the firearm and then you start hearing the stampedes of the bulls, and then you have to start running. At a certain point, you have to time your run so that you can get into the stadium before the bulls get in, or right after so that you could say you ran with the bulls. It is very dangerous. Some people do die while they're running with the bulls. And I've heard stories that they say that if they pull you outside of the track and you die, then. Then they don't count it as dying while you're running with the bulls.

But I did it not once, but six times in Pamplona. I started training people how to run with bulls. I found myself at one point standing next to the professional runners and thought to myself, I have messed up. I should not have positioned myself here. This is not the place, because clearly professional runners think this is the place to position yourself. But it also was an amazing experience. And obviously I do know the views of people about running with the bulls and the negative aspects of it. That's the reason why I never actually participated in stadium activities in the evening with the Torero, because for me, I can run with bulls. I can't actually see the second step, which I think people could have their negative views about even that rationale. But these bulls do get trained and have this amazing life, and they're seen as a surprise to be able to then finally, when they get to a certain of age, be able to participate in this very traditional event and cultural aspect for Spain that has happened for many years.

Matt Bowles: So, what made you decide that you wanted to do it not just again, but six times? And in training other people to do it? What are some of the tips or techniques that you train people on if someone wanted to experience this?

Chris Davila: So, I used to say there was definitely a place for you to position yourself based on how much you run. So, I would always say about a quarter of the track was your sweet spot, spot if you were going to start, because you would just kind of hear the stampedes of the bulls. And the key was to be as close to the edge of the walls of this street in Pamplona, so that realistically the bull would not get you. And if the bull does get close to you, then you turn into fetus mode on the ground and you try to kind of go to the edge or try to find a way out of the street. And based on that quarter standpoint, by the time you would be running, it'd be easier for you if, worst case scenario, you were in an emergency to be able to find yourself not in a walled area where the bull could get you.

There's an area right before it where some more professional runners also go, which is kind of a turn point for the bulls. And that's considered, like, the really dangerous part, because you don't know how the bull is going to run and where it's going to churn and hit. So, they usually advise, don't go there. So, I would always tell people, don't go in that section because it's far more riskier. I would also advise people, don't drink before. Don't be inebriated. When you're going to do this, you really do need to know that you're doing something dangerous and that you have to be in your good senses to be able to do this. Which is one of the things that I think tourists forget. A lot of lads, a lot of guys come to Pamplona to test themselves and be macho, and this is not the time or the place.

And so, I found that it was really helpful for me to stress this because a lot of the people that I was training were tourists doing this. And so, I did feel like it was in my right to remind them, hey, guys, this is not the time if you're drunk, if you're not well, you cannot do this. You're running a risk. But I also felt it was really helpful to show that it was a woman teaching them, a woman that had continued to do it. So, I felt like it was a bit of a girl power mode to say, yes, I've done it not once, but six times, and I know how to do it. The final time that I did it, I forced my husband to do it with me. And so, I want to say he was really impressed by me being like, you got to do this, don't do this. He's an MMA fighter. So, I felt like I had something on him where I was like, sure, you know how to get into a ring and fight, but I know how to run with bulls, and I'm about to teach you.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing. Well, I also want to ask you about the Southeast Asia portion of your trip, another region that I dearly love and have spent many, many months there. I want to ask you, I think, about your experience in Vietnam. One of my very Favorite countries. I've been multiple times. What was your experience like there?

Chris Davila: Vietnam was a surprise for me for sure, because Vietnam was the reason I became a vegetarian. I never thought that I'd churned vegetarian. So, when I went to Vietnam, I noticed that there wasn't that many dogs. So, I googled, and I realized that Vietnam was one of those countries where people would go and eat dogs and so you would only see little puppies. And it really got to me, and I decided to research a little bit more. And Southeast Asia as a whole has quite a few countries that do this. And I decided that I wasn't going to eat meat in Southeast Asia. And I found it really easy. I spent a good amount of time in Southeast Asia. By the time I got to Australia, I was like, I haven't actually missed me. And I was like, let me continue and see how long I can do this. And I've continued to do it. I've turned a bit flexi in the last year. But I for the most part try to follow a vegetarian diet whenever I'm air quote home.

Matt Bowles: I feel like there's a lot of countries that are like that. I mean, in India, for example, you could just eat vegetarian food all day every day. And even if you're used to eating a lot of meat, it's just like the food is so good and the vegetarian dishes are so good you won't even notice that you're missing it because the food is just that good. And it's so catered around vegetarians in a country like that that it's just super easy to do. And all of a sudden, you're like, oh, I guess if I'm in a place like this and I have food like that, that's like not a problem at all, right. So that's awesome. You mentioned Australia. I have to ask you to tell me about this birthday experience when you were coming back from Australia.

Chris Davila: Yeah. So, Australia was super planned. It was very strategic. When I booked my return back to L.A. and I wanted to celebrate the longest birthday that I could. I love birthdays. I will try to keep track of people's birthdays. I love my birthday because my parents used to always actually make our family trips in August, and it always correlated with my birthday. And so, I always knew that my birthday was going to have a trip. So, in Australia I'm like, I'm going to do this. I'm going to celebrate the longest birthday that I can. Because I love birthdays and I love the fact that I'm on my sabbatical. So, I celebrated my birthday in Australia and then I had a flight from Australia to LA, which meant that at a certain point I actually was younger, a year younger, somewhere in the sky, landed in L.A. and it was 7am Got to celebrate my birthday. And it turned into a 42-hour long birthday, and it was amazing. And I think if anybody could do that, I know that there's even longer ways to make your birthday. Like if you do in like New Zealand and then Hawaii, you can do it even longer. It might be on my list figuring it out. But yes, 42 hours long was younger at a certain point in the sky, and it was amazing.

Matt Bowles: So, you finish this 18 month long sabbatical. All of these epic travel experiences, what impact do you think those 18 months had on you? And how did that fundamentally shape you or impact the trajectory of your life moving forward?

Chris Davila: I think some of the obvious ones where I became a vegetarian, right? And as a result of me meeting my now husband in Colombia, I ended up moving to Manchester to actually give our relationship a try. I've been in Manchester for now six years. And as a result of the sabbatical, I knew that I still wanted to travel even though I was ending my sabbatical. I ended my sabbatical because I was ready to begin my process to get my visa for Manchester, but also because I wanted to start becoming a freelancer and a client. Well, now one of my clients reached out and said, we know you're on your sabbatical, but what if we find a way for you to come back to the workforce and you work with us remotely as a freelancer? And I decided to take that leap. It just seemed right.

And so, I feel like, thanks to my sabbatical, I literally gave up my whole life before the sabbatical. I gave up my job, I gave up everything. But it ended up changing the trajectory of where I am today. And I say to people, sometimes I have to take leaps, not knowing where they're going to take you, because it's going to

really surprise you where you're going to end up. If you would have told me back in May 2017 that I was going to become a vegetarian, that I was going to become a freelancer, that I was going to find the person that I would end up marrying and that I would end up moving to another country, I would have told you were crazy. And here I am, and I've created a really beautiful life for myself. And I think that person, that version of me back then who said I don't care if I give up everything, because it's going to sort itself out. I just know it. And even if it doesn't, I'm going to figure it out. I'm Chris. I figured out all these other things. I've done all these other things. It's going to be okay. And it has been.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. For direct links to end everything we've discussed in this episode, as well as all of the ways to find, follow, and connect with Chris, just go to themaverickshow.com and go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And be sure to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Chris Davila. Good night, everybody.