

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Jupiter Kayonga. He is a storyteller and travel photographer currently chasing stories in the beautiful chaos of Paris and around the world. Born in Rwanda, he grew up meeting clients who would come on safari tours run by his father, which sparked his interest in storytelling, which began his love of photography, where he has been using each click of the camera to capture and tell a unique story. He believes every person, every place, and every little moment is a story waiting to be told. And that those stories can be crafted to help us connect with the world around us. He has now traveled to over 80 countries on all seven continents, chasing those stories.

Jupiter, welcome to the show.

Jupiter Kayonga: Thank you, Machu. Thanks for having me.

Matt Bowles: I'm so excited to have you here. Let's just start off though by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today.

Unfortunately, we are not in person. I am actually in the Blue Ridge mountains of Asheville, North Carolina on the East coast of the United States today. And where are you?

Jupiter Kayonga: In the steamy and hot summer evenings of Paris.

Matt Bowles: Amazing, man. One of my favorite cities. Well, let's just start off by sharing a little bit about your background and going all the way back to Rwanda.

Can you talk about where you grew up and your memories from that period?

Jupiter Kayonga: I was born originally in Rwanda in a small town. I grew up in Kigali did my schooling there. My father and my mom were in the travel business. My mom used to work for an airline. Ethiopian airline, and my father had a small travel company. And so, from that time on, it was school, getting to meet from time-to-time travelers and get in contact with, uh, people who came to my father to see safari tours that he organized to go and see buffaloes, lions and zebras and giraffes and elephants in Rwanda national parks.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about that period and what impact it had on you meeting those other international people who would come from around the world to take your father's tours and how you initially got interested in photography?

Jupiter Kayonga: When I was growing up, it's not every day that you get to see a white person. So, in Kenya and Rwanda, we say Mzungu.

And so, it was kind of interesting to see white people because you see maybe them on TV through movies and stuff and all the power of movies. Transcends everything. Right. And so, I remember seeing them and then learning a little bit about them. And then you get to talk to them a little bit. And I remember one family who were from Florida, they came over to our house to have dinner.

And then the guy had a camera as well. And my parents also love photography. And so, there's a picture I think on my website where you can see he has the camera around my neck. And so, from that day onwards, that was something that was still in me. I see taking pictures. And my parents had already traveled before as well and a few of my other family members as well before I traveled.

So, to say that from that time till I was nine, I had quite the privilege as well to travel to Ethiopia, to Dubai. And then we had so many pictures from our travels with my family, so that we would take pictures and post them on Instagram. You print them with film and unfortunately, obviously we had the genocide around 1994 when I was about nine years old.

And then my life completely took a dramatic turn. I lost half of my family members, including my dad, including other family members as well. And then from that day on, my life started to take a different turn where you had to flee and leave Rwanda. Difficult circumstances, obviously. And then go to a neighboring country and try and make it out alive basically.

And so, when we left the war, that sort of seed that had been planted in me, like of photography was still, I mean, because when you're running away from a dangerous situation, you sort of trying to. Or in my case, I was trying to sort of remember the time or things that had happened or the evolution of time.

But at that time, you didn't have the luxury or the capacity to be able to document that time. Right. So, we only had the photos to as a souvenir, but I think also that gave me a certain gift of photogenic gift to be able to like capture moments, encompass, ingrain them with my mind. And so that has followed me out throughout my whole journey.

Matt Bowles: I cannot even imagine the experience of living through a genocide. When you think back to that period, how did you process what was going on at that age and start taking the next step from there?

Jupiter Kayonga: Well, at that age for nine years old, I remember that time vividly that it was survival at that moment. When my father was killed, we could have been killed, but my mom was not in the house.

So, we had gunpoint, and they sent us to a room and they executed my father. But then there was the mansion that we were going to come back. So, neighbors sort of hid us for a few days. And then before we had to be sent off somewhere else. Two legs go in a refugee camp and then our aunt and stuff came to save us on that journey though was traumatic from that day on because you go and hide in one zone and the war comes there you go and hide in that place then the war is also there and then it's like a journey of going and then the war is just following so you went from one place to another obviously you can hear gunshots and grenades and rockets and the whole thing.

And from that moment on, this is what is happening. And it's a chaotic thing because you can't see too far out in the future. You can't plan too far out in the future because you do not have a sense of know what's going to happen or what's going to be coming. And it's also a disruption in your life because you don't get back to see your friends back at school.

At a young age where it was just like, you were a sponge. So, you're taking it now in the images of war and our parents and my parents, mom and, and family members who are around me also tried to shield us from that, but there's only so much you can shield cause there's the, the visual, but there's also the oral, you can hear things, you can see things, you can feel things, right?

Cause on energy, you know, like when for me, they killed my father, when I had the gunshot from that day on. There's something within me that knew that my life had changed forever. I couldn't grasp where exactly it's non palpable kind of event in your life where you sort of you know, that something has happened, but you don't know exactly what has happened.

Matt Bowles: And then what do you remember of the immediate refugee experience after that? As you were fleeing and your mother was trying to get you to safety, what was that journey like?

Jupiter Kayonga: It was with my, a few family members and a few people who helped us. Just, I remember the, like yesterday, like it's a lot of chaos, uncertainty, darkness, a peculiar smell as well, cold, airy. You get to see horror and fear on a lot of people's faces as well. Screams, because we had to hide in cupboards when you hear gunshots. You had, it's pause in time, almost a slowdown, you

know, when you watch a movie and every day frames start slowing down and stuff, but it's still moving at the same time.

Whilst everything else around that bubble is moving at a different pace. You know, people are moving on with their life in certain parts because we had to go to other countries. You had to learn a different language, but not only the bubble as well. And trying to understand what's happened to us or try and move on forward.

And also, that bondage that we had with my brother and sister because they were super young as well. At a very young age. So, you had developed coping mechanisms to diminish the angst, anxiety, a lot of anxiety that build up and stuff because you don't know what or you have to readapt. And also, we had top-down command in terms of how parents talk to you.

And so, which is normal in a certain sense. So, it's not like today where you're like, okay, you sort of sit down and start talking. You didn't have a choice, obviously. And so, yeah, it's a whole mix of a lot of emotions, anxiety, fear. I wouldn't say hopelessness because at nine years old, obviously not retrospectively more like an adult.

So maybe I'll have a look a little bit over that time and over trying to over analyze or analyze those feelings at that moment. But in that moment, at the drop of a moment, you wouldn't know exactly how to say. You're feeling, you don't know anything. The one moment you have a house and a lot of cars and the next moment you are sleeping somewhere and you're meeting different people, or you are at the border going to another country on a bike or by foot and so many things going on.

Matt Bowles: And once you were able to get out of Rwanda and get out of the country. Can you talk about your refugee journey from there as you grew up and came of age?

Jupiter Kayonga: We've had to adapt to another society or another culture. Ethiopian culture is a little bit different because the language is completely different, it's Amharic. It's a little bit similar with us Rwanda as well, but then we didn't get enough time to stay there, to be able to sort of create like a nucleus of like friends, kids, the same age as us, until we started, until we moved to Ghana. Where here you had to like sort of build up the whole ecosystem of France, thanks to a family who was hosting us there.

Get back into school, but then in school you have to learn a new language. I had to learn English. I didn't speak English at that time, so then I had to learn English. So, I would say the refugee journey went until even when I came to France because I was a refugee as well with France. And then I had to go through that process of getting integrated as well.

So, I would say it's always part of me. I would say, yeah, it's the sense of belonging of home. It will be, it's a gray zone as well.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about your career path? I know your family was in the travel and tourism industry. Can you talk about your decision to go in that direction as well?

Jupiter Kayonga: I had been in France about seven, eight years. And I was unfulfilled. And I was really, really, really unfulfilled and impatient, angry. I'm a huge buff of documentaries as well. And so having had my education in Ghana, where we talked a little bit about colonialism and a huge part of the whole issue of that part of the West African slavery system.

And then I came to France and obviously France also has its own history with slavery and stuff. And you don't talk about it that much. And it's like you have an education in one system, and another system you start questioning a lot of things. So that started adding up a little bit for me.

I couldn't feel like I was, being plagued or being ingrained. My roots were like, not really, really solidified here. I was also living in the center of France and a little bit off the side of France. I had a good ecosystem of friends, but it was a sort of a cycle had come to an end and somehow, I did my obviously, I took the decision, but my energy was, you need to move. And I had watched a lot of documentaries, and I was like, I need to go out in the world, go back out in the world and stuff, but I didn't know how.

So, I had this opportunity to go fly for Emirates as a flight attendant in Dubai, and I got an opportunity to go. And I had been to Dubai already in 92, so I was going back again. And I remember my father, before he passed away, he wanted us to go to Dubai and live in Dubai. That was the goal. But then the war happened, so it was my ticket out of beautiful France. The world is such a big play. It's such a big, big open book.

And so having excelled in geography and in history, if you take a compass and you do a 360 and you have half of the world, so it was a conjunction of everything that aligned and exactly at that moment as well, that's when my photography came in as well, it was there because when I came to France, I did take a few pictures at the beginning when I was in Paris.

Then I stopped, then I didn't take pictures, then I started taking, but it's, you know, it's those flip phones. You take pictures and it's so pixelated, you can't see you. But then I'm going to Dubai, then my photography, now it's coming. But then at that time, the storytelling as well was different. So, I was working for an international airline.

It was my first professional job. Obviously, I had like small, small student jobs, like working at McDonald's and the airport and stuff. But this was 23 or 22. And you're living in this cosmopolitan city with other people who are the same age, similar like you. I remember going to my residence the first evening I arrived in Dubai and when my flight mate was from France, shout out Yacine.

I had other people who were from Greece, Slovakia, Spain, Singapore, India, Ethiopia. It's like, finally my people.

Matt Bowles: During that period, can you talk about how your love of photography and storytelling evolved?

Jupiter Kayonga: In my pictures at the beginning, I was just the central subject or majority. I was the subject within a city or within an environment. And the place was also the co-star. So, it's like a co-star kind of thing. The adventure of Jupiter, the adventure of me in this city. So, in the beginning, I still have those pictures. You see me a lot in those pictures. With a huge, that Amazon smile that goes all the way to your ears. Living life to the fullest, you know, I'm like, I have survived some crazy stuff.

So, I removed the seatbelt and just pushed her. So, listening, don't remove your seatbelt when you're driving, just went full on. Imagine like within a week, Matt. So, I'm talking to you, right? Imagine right now. Tomorrow morning in Bangkok, the next day or two days later, I'm in Sydney, but my friends, they're like, wait, is that possible?

So, it was crazy. It was going so fast. I remember my first trip, my first month, I arrived in June in Dubai, and I was posting pictures of my training and stuff. July pops around. September boom. Bangkok, Singapore, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, Brisbane, Oakland, Lagos. Wait, what? Dubai, London. Wait, how? All within 30 days.

It's confusing for a human brain. So, the beginning was just me in the picture, me in this place, me doing this job, me doing this. And as I evolved, I started subtracting myself out of the picture and I

started putting maybe the place I was going as the main character. And that's evolvement had come because at the beginning when I started traveling, I'll come home and see my friends and I'll be, oh my God, I was in Sydney, this, this, this, this.

But then I saw like, man, I have this opportunity. I can come to Paris when I want, when I have a flight, but that yearning for knowledge started like creeping in and saying, you know, that civilization that you wanted to visit, that civilization that you want. And so, I remember I was at a friend's place, Helen shouts out to her and my Greek friend, and she had this sort of different pictures that she had bought from Ikea.

That had like all the world wonders. And I was like, huh, it'd be so interesting to be able to visit all the world wonders. So okay, boom, I had drone flight, I went to see the coliseum and you do the whole thing. It was just a little bit of a small challenge for me, maybe I think to boost my little ego or something like that to be like, okay, I went there.

So, I did Petra. I did a few, but the others took time because the LNE didn't have a huge network in South America yet, for example. And I remember going to Chichén Itzá, but also when I was going to these places, I was studying the thing that was there, the main attraction, but then I was studying the civilization.

So, it's like, oh, the civilization. Okay. Then that started creeping out into more like, okay, so this civilization was there. This was there. What were the reason? What happened to them? How did they get eradicated? Why? What were the lessons? Because when I came to Europe, they were talking about, oh, Socrates and Romans and Julius Caesar and all this huge, huge civilization, be it Greek or Roman, right?

Empires. But there's so many other empires, Achaemenids, Incas, Mayans, you name it. And even in Africa as well. And so, I started doing civilization, then I started doing expedition, but then each time the subject would alternate or change for reasons. So that's how my storytelling started evolving.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about some of the places where you have spent time? I think maybe where I'd like to start would be with your relationship with India. I have been to India a couple times, and I always love asking people about their stories from India, but maybe just start off at the beginning in terms of your connection with India and then how that evolved.

Jupiter Kayonga: So, India was on my last tour of list of all the world on this Taj Mahal was the last on my list because I had done Machu Picchu, Christ Redeemed.

I had done all of them. That was the last one. So, I had some free time, and I contacted this company. I was like, "Hey man, I want to go to Taj Mahal, and I want to do Jaipur". Because I had studied in school, the pink city. And I want to do Agra, Jaipur. I want to do Jodhpur, which is the blue city. And I want to do Udaipur.

Udaipur, especially being in the James Bond movie, Octopussy. I don't know if you've ever seen it, there's a hotel in the middle of the lake, which is an actual hotel. Taj Palace, fantastic hotel. Uh, so the way I did the itinerary, I wanted to fly in, I think, to Udaipur and then I'll do all the reverse, and I'll finish off in Delhi.

So, it's a circuit normally that everybody does in 12 days. Not your boy here. I have to do it in six because that's the only amount of free time I had that time. At that time either contact like these huge travel companies to be able to organize yourself or you had to join a group. And I remember I was

starting to get tired of all these group tours in huge buses because I did that one time in Mexico in Chichen Itza.

And I was like, nah, I need something where it's more tailored to what I want and it's me and nothing else. So, I sent out a few requests on, I looked at these researchers and I sent out a few requests on Google. Nobody came back. A few like, no, we don't do that. She never came back. And one guy, it's like, "Hey man", he even called me.

Actually, it's like, I'm like, "Hello?" "Yeah, we can do your thing, but you have to do like this, this, this, this". I'm like, "Oh, okay, cool. It's like, how'd you pay?" "No, don't worry. We'll come; driver is coming to pick you up at the airport. No problem". I'm like, "Okay, cool". So, I go to Delhi flying to Delhi and he has his driver who come and pick me up.

So, I do a temple in Delhi. I do Agra. Then I do call my secret. When I go to Jaipur, you know, I'm in the car, you arrive in India. It's already, you arrive at this temp. The first time I arrive in Delhi, it's like billion people in India. So, imagine right in Delhi. It's crazy. It's humid. It's like so much going on.

I go to this temple. It's a Hindu temple that's outside Delhi. Massive, bro. So massive. Made of marbles. The artwork on that temple is incredible. But to go in, it's like you're going through the airport or NASA. You have to remove everything. No camera, nothing. So, I do that, and the driver is always driving me around.

Beep, beep, the horn and everything. There's so much going on in India. I'm like, oh my God. So, I arrive and he's like, "Okay, we have to go and meet my boss in Jaipur". I'm like, "I'm tired. I had a specific plan". My plan was five in Agra. I had to go and see the Taj Mahal. So, in Jaipur, I had to go and see the market or something nice in the morning.

So, I do the Amma tour, which is the fort in Jaipur. And then it's like, "Okay, let's go meet your boss". So, I go meet the boss. Is this young guy? It's like, Oh, welcome. Welcome dude. And then we start chatting. He's like, what do you want? I enjoy biryani. I was just having a biryani. It's like, "Okay, you want beer?" "Okay. Beer".

So, we started chatting, man. And it was the fusion. It was like a fusion nuclear bomb. It's just like, boom. So, we chatted. He's like, okay, tomorrow morning I take you to the flower market. So, we go in the flower market. So, this is a video of me and him in the flower market at six in the morning.

You have Jasmine, roses and stuff. And I'm like, this is a wild, wild place. So, we bonded, finished my tour and left. So, it was like, for me, that was it, India. You know, I had done my thing and that's it. A few months, I leave Dubai and like, I'm in France. And one time he texts me on Facebook. He's like, "Hey, what are you doing?"

I'm like, "Oh, I'm good, man. I'm not Dubai anymore. I'm in France. I'm in Paris and this, this, this", Oh, it's like, "Oh, nice. I'm also in France". I'm like, "you're in France". It's like, "yeah, I'm in the garden here". I'm like, "come on. You can't be serious. I'm also in the garden. I'm doing a photo shoot". So, we meet up. It was like, we hadn't met since I left India.

So, it was like this, "Oh my God, how are you? How's everything?" It's like, "Oh, what are you doing?" "I'm going to Romania to this". There's a famous singer in Romania. She invited me for the birthday party. "You can come". And I was like, uh, opportunity always arises. You either take it or not. I was cool. Let's do it.

So, we go there. He's like, "Oh, so what are you doing now? Since you left Emirates, what are you going to do?" I'm like, "Oh, I don't know, man. I'm still trying to find my way". And mind you, I knew that India

was rising, and India is going to be a super interesting country for the next hundred years. So, he throws me out this, “Oh, you should come to India and help me with my business. And you can travel, you can take pictures. It took me three hours.”

“Wait, you serious?” Boop, done deal. So then three months later, September, I found myself back in India. And this time I was going to live there. So no, like, oh, you can run away. That was full on socket. And oh man, India has a special power. And if you're not ready to receive that energy and power of India, it can be a lot, very overwhelming.

I always tell people India is a huge sort of magnifying glass that shows you real life, death, life. Poverty, rich, all the extremities and all the little nuances that you see in your everyday life that we do not want to see, India shows it to you on a full magnified glass. And it's like in your face.

And so, for me, it was challenging. I didn't speak Hindi. I was in Rajasthan and Jaipur and Sri Lanka. Okay. And people, they are like, “Hey boss, what are you doing here?” Because the black guy living here in this colony, it's kind of neighborhood. What are you doing here? And then there's like a little bit of etiquette that you have to understand, try and mingle with it a little bit.

I would say, but because I had the skills living in Ghana, where I was doing boarding school, coming to France, trying to adapt myself to a new culture in France, which is completely different from Africa, then moving on to Dubai. I had all these different skills that when I went to India, it was putting on you can put me in a hostile environment.

And I'm good to go in a span of eight months, I got to see, I don't know how many festivals, I can't count, very powerful things. I got to witness my friend's father, Janu. His father talked to me one day, one evening, and the next day he passed away. That was a very, very powerful thing because, you know, we live life, we want to travel, we want to go here, we want to do these things.

Tomorrow is not given. It's not guaranteed. In a snap of a finger, tomorrow you can just be gone. And to be able to enjoy like a tea with him. And then the next day he's not there, that sort of hit home like crazy. And to be able to go to festivals, I did holy festival, Diwali festival, Ganga. It's like, there's so much going on.

Your senses are so awakened, alive, challenged your biases, religion, spirituality. What is life? What is this? What is rich? What is poverty? Within your soul, within your body, it's shaking, it's vibrating. And you go to this festival, it's called Kumbh Mela, a thousand-year-old festival. And it's one of the largest religious spiritual gatherings in the world.

To be able to see people's last journey, where you have that faith within a gesture, or within their beliefs, their core beliefs. I need to do this before I go into the other realm or into the other world. It's such a powerful thing.

Matt Bowles: I think your approach to decentering yourself in your documentation and storytelling about travel is really significant and important.

I think it's important for folks to understand that travel writing was actually a really integral part of colonialism. Of these people that would go around, and they would tell stories from their perspective, centering themselves. In these places and then project that out to the world. And so, your approach to flipping that upside down and centering the stories and experiences of the local people that are there, I think is really important.

Do you have any tips broadly in terms of travel writing, in terms of photography, in terms of storytelling for people that are creating content while they're traveling about how they should do that more effectively?

Jupiter Kayonga: I think it's being the potential and being aware. That's the number one key. Asking permissions.

Obviously, sometimes you don't have a discharge document in terms of image rights for people you're taking pictures of. So that sometimes physically can become challenging or maybe have a Polaroid and then give them that image. Or when you're trying to tell their story, how do you incorporate them into the storytelling and writing in a way that humanizes them and doesn't put them in a space of, if you're taking pictures of children, for example, make sure maybe they have their family member who have given you the permission to do so.

And also, what context are you telling the picture in that, in that context is also important. I think those, if you're coming from a place of, obviously this can be subjective, right? A space of wanting to tell the story wholeheartedly with authenticity. And I think that is something that we need as a storyteller or as a photographer, as a filmmaker, then you have to understand the narrative that you're going to tell those people there or the people that are on the other side is has to be intentional. It has to make sure that it respects both sides as well.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about a couple other places that you have traveled to that I have not been. I have seen your pictures from Cuba, and I have read your blog posts about your experience there, but can you share a little bit about your experience in Cuba?

Jupiter Kayonga: So, Cuba was a little bit of fantasy about Cuba for its history, its struggle, and its place in the world. It's very strategically located. And. Obviously I was infused with Buena Vista's Social Club album that I was in love with. That album is just *Chan Chan* and it's just amazing. And so, I had this image that was instilled in me for a very long time that I wanted to go to Cuba, but I didn't know when.

It finally happened that I went in 2015 and got this beautiful privilege to be able to on this special part of the world that has such a historic and so much trauma as well. I went on a run one morning, you know when you want to feel the vibe of a place, the first thing you do in the morning is like go for a run.

And I was like, "Oh my God", I'm just going for a run on the Malecon. You know, when you land in Havana, I don't know, it's been a while now. There's that gasoline, diesel, old leather, old something, infused air, which is hazardous for your respiratory system. So, I was like, "I'm just going to go run".

Buildings were run down. And where am I in this old, huge American car? And on my run, I injured myself badly coming back. And as fate would have it, I was saved or was helped by this Cuban family on the side of the road. And my Spanish teacher, bless him, must be mad at me because my Spanish was horrible. And somehow the gods shined light and knowledge into my brain and I was able to speak Spanish.

It was like, what happened to you? "Oh, malo, my músculo, my muscle is jammed. And there she went upstairs and called her nephew and then called the grandma. And you see this old Cuban lady coming out of her house and then they bring me into their home. This was like, after nine hours, I got into Havana and they're like, what do you need?

Ae sienta aqui. Like I was in sheer pain. They're like, "Oh, don't worry. Just chill". And they gave me some guava juice. They were watching some telenovelas. You couldn't pull this shit. And this lady's

like, “Oh, I have some cream from balm that I use for my old lady's back”. So, they were massaging my leg nine hours of time getting to cure.

Can't pull this thing out of a book. I was like, wow. And the level of hospitality unmatched, incredible. They don't have much. But wow, the level of kindness and generosity and wondering where you're from and what are you doing and what's your journey and what's your story. And we connected so well. So, I was like, “Okay, tonight I had a meetup with a group that was doing my tour”.

“Let's meet up for dinner”. “What'd you guys need? Can we go like to the supermarket, Mercado and go and get some stuff?” Like, “No, no, we're going to get everything. We do the strapping together”. I spent 10 days in Cuba, although I couldn't dance any salsa. I couldn't go to any salsa classes because I was on one leg.

And I managed to, before I left the Havana, I managed to go and see them again before I left. And it was, man, I still remember about it. Even the guy, we added each other on LinkedIn and stuff. Such an incredible energy. It was also for my birthday. The song sung for me. Oh my God. I had like some crazy ass parties in Vinales and Trinidad. It was insane. Yeah.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing, man.

Jupiter Kayonga: Yeah. It's just so too nice to smile when I think about it. It was just insane.

Matt Bowles: All right. Well, I got to ask you about one more place that I have also not yet been. I have been to six continents. You have been to seven. Can you talk about your experience going to Antarctica?

Jupiter Kayonga: Good old wise lady. Oh my God. Antarctica. So, I think one day I researched, and I found out like, oh, you could actually go on an expedition ship. I was like, damn, Elon is taking too much time to build this ship for us to go to other planets. So, I was like, you know what?

This is the equivalent. I need to remember coming back to the storytelling. Like I need to see people like me or people like my color going to this different place and discovering right. And learning and stuff like that. I know it's a privilege. No doubts about it. So, I had this chance. I was like, oh, I want to go on this crazy expedition, but I wanted to make it into going into different worlds.

So, it was Antarctica, which is like a polar place, very white and icebergs and ice sheets and all these things, dramatic. I wanted to go somewhere as well that I combined it, and I was able to. So, I did an Antarctic expedition, but I did went to Iguazu. It's just the biggest, one of the biggest falls in the world on the border with Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

Very humid, green jungle like. And then I also did at the end of my trip after Antarctica, I went to Atacama in northern part of Chile, driest place in the world. It's almost at 5, 000 meters at the elevation, no water, almost rains there, but you can see the stars. You can see the galaxies. It's an incredible place.

So that's how I planned that trip. So, I researched about Antarctica. I had done like a few expeditions just before to Kilimanjaro. I was like, okay, next one has to be Antarctica and Antarctica, you have to plan it out. So, let's say it's a short season as well. It's like November till March. And depending which part of the season, if you go early in the season, there's a lot of ice spots.

Once you go later, maybe close to April, it's like the ice has receded and you can see more land. When you go in Antarctica, you never see the same thing. And most of the ships depart from Puerto Arenas in

Chile Argentina border or Ushuaia. And Ushuaia used to watch documentaries. I dreamed about this last month frontier kind of town before you go into the wilderness.

So, it's just stuff for the movies, like expeditions and going to another planet kind of thing. So, it was one of those expeditions where you're going on a school expedition. The anticipation was crazy. You have, they give you like a whole program, like you have to sign this document, that document, you need this insurance.

This thing is serious. It is like the countdown. You need a list. You need like this number of socks, this number of underwear, this number of trousers, outer layer, inner layer, down jacket. They're going to give you some boots and a big down jacket as well. It's impermeable for like water and stuff. And then yeah, you get into Argentina and Buenos Aires and then they pick you up and they take you to this nice hotel.

You have some nice steak and some nice Malbec. The good stuff. And then yeah, the next day it's like, okay guys, at 5am you have to put your bags here. They give you a card and you're like, wait, you got to be serious. This thing is happening. They take you to the bus, you go into the small flights, and you fly over one of the most beautiful coastlines over the Pampa and all the way down to Ushuaia.

And now you're all the way at the bottom of earth and it's like this little, tiny thingy, the plane flies between mountains and then boom, you arrive into this fishing town. And it's windy. It's sort of moonlight, gray, dark and gloomy, but with humongous mountain and ice caps just behind you in the background.

This is incredible. And that's already set the tone for the whole journey. Because you've got, you always have some few cod in Ushuaia to have this dish, which is like cod fish, really incredible. Uh, I went up on the small hill where you can see sort of the bay and the port. Because it also used to be like, uh, it has a particular history, you know, with Shackleton and all the other, Mike Jalen and all that stuff.

Then you embark on the boat. It's like, you're going on a ship. I'm going on a ship. Never been in my life. Take some sickness tablets. Don't forget those. And you're on the boat. And then they start doing the speech. This is where the life jackets are. This is where the boats are. This is, I'm like, oh my God, I can't believe it.

And then at 6 PM sharp. And you leave in the port. And it's such a beautiful departure because mountain in the background, Argentina on the right, and then on the left side is Chile. And so, it's like this narrow banner of earth. And then the boat is just going in the water and it's so beautiful. And it's like, yeah, for two, three days, you don't see any land, just albatrosses and birds and huge mountains of water.

The notorious Drake's Passage stays to its name. Yeah, and it's just incredible. It's two, three days of learning about the history of the place. Ornithologist, penguin ologist, historian, glaciologist, you name it. Photographer on how to take photos in ice, how to take photos of wildlife, going around the ship, getting to know the people on the ship.

Talking and it's just insane. And then for three days, you're just anxious like a baby or a kid at Disneyland. When are you going to go? Cause you want to see your first iceberg. And I remember I'll wake up at three in the morning where my room was, was like in the middle of the ship all the way at the bottom.

Poor people's problem, but it's also the best place to be. But then you run onto the deck all the way on the seventh floor, and you arrive all the way at the top in front. You thought wind was wind? That wind was like the wind that goes out into your jacket, into all your layers, to your skin, into your bones, into your cells.

This is wind. Frozen wind. It's notorious. You see the sun doesn't set totally. It's huge clouds, but it's sort of hueish, white, grayish, pinkish kind of color. And you see something white. Is that ice? Is that ice? No, it's not ice. It's like three, four in the morning. And then you go back to bed and then it's like, yes, that's ice.

And you see your first iceberg and just gliding between icebergs. And then from there on, it's just expeditions. And you have lots of rules. All you have to be a hundred at one time on the land of Antarctica. When you're coming off land, going to the boat, you have to clean your boots. They help you clean your boots.

Then you go onto the boat. Then you arrive on the ship. You have a SAS where you get clean and then you also get clean again before you go into the booth. And so, there's a procedure as well, but it's a huge privilege, no doubt. But it's such a beautiful, intellectually stimulating experience and physically demanding experience as well.

All your senses activated when you do the pull up lunge. You dive into a huge frozen margarita, and then you're like, oh my God, I'm going to die. And they pull you back out. When you see penguins, you get to sit down in the penguin poop. And then the penguins just like, oh, this looks like a very comfortable spot.

So, I have on my CV, I think I should put it. I had my two feet; I had been used as pills for penguins. So, I was a penguin daddy. And you see whales, humpback whales, dolphins, pods. You see seals, beautiful animal. You see ginormous icebergs. Wow, that place, the air that you breathe in that place, just gliding between the icebergs on the Zodiac.

It's engraved in my brain like crazy. I still remember it today, which is such a beautiful experience. And if you can ever do it, I highly recommend

Matt Bowles: It is so high on my list for sure. Well, Jupiter, I also want to ask you about your decision to return to Rwanda over 20 years after you left. Can you talk about why you chose to return to Rwanda and then what that experience was like for you and what you found there and what Rwanda is like today.

Jupiter Kayonga: You run away from a place for 20 years and you sort of have this lingering thoughts and dreams and perception, sort of imagination. What is it going to be like there?

Well, how does this place look? Especially to a lot of places I've always gone back, that always keeps recurring. But Rwanda, to be more specific, I left in traumatic and difficult time and always thought, will I ever get the opportunity to go? And again, opportunity always arises, and you have to be on the dance floor to have it.

So, I had a good friend of mine shout out to Shabnam, with one of her best friends, they wanted to go to see gorillas. So, I was like, hey man, I think we should go to Rwanda because we have gorillas as well. And I knew somehow deep down within me, I was ready. And so, I decided to go with them. The moment we landed, I always told this to my family.

It's like, it's a three-man journey. It was me physically, the person I was that day, the person I used to be as a kid, a nine-year-old kid, and the spirit or my energy of me in my imagination in dream of how it

will be. And being blessed with such a good memory, to be able to remember so many places, they all come together and fit like a glove.

Obviously, things have changed, places had developed, and some places hadn't changed so much. Thank God, because then you can't recognize anything, right? And so, I was able to recognize a lot of places, and especially where I left. The last time I left this house was my father got killed in that house. So, it was such a powerful journey, because You know, like you land someplace, the air feels, man, it's like, you get in and then the system just switches in your body.

It's like, oh, we know this thing. Oh, we know that smell. Oh, we know this. That language sounds like something you would know. And so, I speak all these different languages that have nothing to do with my culture, Korean. I can say a few words in Mandarin and Japanese and all these words. My mother tongues. I have a huge difficulty of speaking it and I don't know if it's a mental blockage or the language is in a huge vault in my brain, close behind Fort Knox kind of doors.

And you'd be like, you need to get back into it. And so, yeah, when I was there, it was just like, things started like sort of connecting. It's like a matrix that is like, wow, I didn't know this thing was in my mind.

For the 10 days, it was just A really nice, incredible healing, I would say, as well. And I think personally, I was also at the level where I was ready to do it. And I think other people, if I'm being mindful in my community, family members or other part, might not be ready and might not have that opportunity as well to be able to go on that journey. And for me, being at that young age and coming back as a young man, it was a blessing.

Matt Bowles: How do you think about the concept of home at this point in your life?

Jupiter Kayonga: Home. I think home first starts within yourself, right? Where is the longest place that you lived in the world? Within your body. It's a concept that I came across a few years ago. And especially for me, having the privilege and the opportunity, or due to circumstances beyond my control sometimes, to go and live in different parts of the globe.

Being a black person as well as an African man and in the world and being conscious with the global geopolitics and all that it encompasses, being a French citizen and that baggage also brings another baggage. So, it's like, damn, I might need another room, another, a big hotel. I think I had to first embrace the concept of having home within myself.

I know that's philosophical and energetic level for people to comprehend sometimes. Because I carry myself and I carry my body all the time. It doesn't matter wherever I go and live. Antarctica, anywhere. I'm still going to have to take my body with me. So, having embraced that, then how does the home physically be interpreted within me?

Then it means it's a project or it's a chapter during my life. So, the first 16 years of my life, chapter of my life, Home was in Africa, and it is still home. Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Burundi if you can say. Then another probably 10 years in France, Europe basically. Another 10 years Dubai, Middle East and Asia and India.

It kind of evens out everywhere, spread beautifully. Think you might invite me to America to kind of live there next. I'm just kidding. So yeah, I would say like home will be where close to my loved ones. I think that is something that is so vital in terms of the community that you build around you, people who inspire you, people who drive you and a place that you feel safe.

And it's important. And I like to live in a place that is globally connected somehow, because I feel we are all connected within one another with the stories, within our culture, within food, within a lot of things. So, depending on the chapter I'll be living or I'm living currently, the place I'll be living will be somewhere that has a little bit of everything like that.

Matt Bowles: Jupiter, I also want to ask your opinion on the impact of travel and tourism on the places that we go. So, on the one hand, you were talking about when you were a kid, you got a lot of value out of people coming from all around the world and telling you stories. Having that cultural exposure and I interviewed a friend of mine who's a digital nomad from Kenya, Eva Adongo, and she's been to like a hundred countries.

She's still based in Nairobi, but she was saying a similar thing. And she was saying, you know, when I go to some of these countries, like she spent time in Afghanistan and places like that. And she's like, these people would never be able to come to Kenya, but by me going there, I can bring Kenyan culture to them.

And there's value through some of those types of cultural exchanges. So, there's that on the one hand, but then on the other hand, I was in Tanzania just last year and the Maasai were being violently evicted from their ancestral homelands by the government for the interest of expanding some piece of the tourism apparatus for foreign corporations that had an interest in doing that.

It strikes me that there is a neo colonial dynamic. Too much of the travel and tourism industry that is not having a very positive impact on local people at the same time. And I'm curious if you can share some of your thoughts and reflections on that and maybe any tips you have for how we as travelers can be a little bit more conscious and thoughtful and ethical as we move through this world.

Jupiter Kayonga: It's a delicate balance. I know it's a very simplistic way of saying it's a delicate balance, because I think if we don't go to certain places, okay, they might be preserved, but then the people over there might not be able to sustain themselves. Obviously, tourism for a lot of countries, around the world is a huge part of their GDP.

I live in a country that has the most visitors' country in the world, close to 90 million or a hundred million tourists a year. The way that system was built has created value as jobs well for people here. So that also you can find in other countries around the world. But now how do we not exploit people's land to be able to build maybe private game reserves?

Huge massive corporation of Airbnb driving rent on people cannot live in certain areas because they're being gentrified. And I feel finding the right cursor is actually bringing all the people who are involved in that ecosystem together to try and find the right balance. Because I think if we do not bring all the people involved and try and find the right nuances, somebody is going to be left behind and somebody is going to be cheated.

So how do we find the balance between all the different participant in this ecosystem to find something that is ethically responsible and respectable for the neighborhood, the people who are living in, the neighbor who are being hospitable to the people who are coming to see and learn how they develop.

How do we respect environmentally? Because then how are you going to these places in jets, in planes, in trains? I think that we have to obviously look at different models. I don't think there's a one size fits all kind of thing that is going to make you happy, make this person happy. It's not possible. I think the concept of Airbnb was fantastic because it's also allowed people to be able to like, "Hey, Matt, you come into Paris, I have a spare room where you can come and sleep over."

But then it went into the extreme, right? Game reserves. That is another debate. I think as well. Where sort of, okay, we have to protect this land, but these people used to have this land, maybe to bring their cattle to graze and to be able to walk on the land and stuff like that. You can see also some parts of Puerto Rico where people used to have access to beaches, can go to those beaches and also certain monuments and certain artifacts were looted from one country.

And then they generate huge revenue in another country. Well, you can take care of it. You don't know how to take care of it. Well, you can teach me, and I can, you can bring it back. Because if you look at it from a very macroeconomic perspective, there's so much going on in terms of immigration, illegal immigration, destruction of the environment, prostitution, sex tourism, killing people.

I mean, there's so many things that are involved as well, and the ecosystem have something that is cohesive for everyone. So now we have these tools and systems to be able to communicate and maybe lessons learned from the past. How can we educate ourselves and also listen to the people in the South or listen to the people in those communities in those places that are suffering?

What kind of tourism that they need or how can we build something sustainable for them to be able to take care of their family, take their kids to school, build something useful for their community? But I think it's very important to have the conversation and not take a top-down approach.

Matt Bowles: I think it's a super important discussion for a lot of people to start having, especially as the remote work trend accelerates and the digital nomad movement accelerates, and all of that stuff starts taking off.

I mean, these are really important things to start considering talking about and becoming conscious of trying to be positive. Participant in terms of thinking about what some of those solutions are and how we can move through this world in a way that is beneficial to other people. So totally Jupiter, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round.

When you think back about all of the travel that you've done over your life at this point, what impact has all of that had on you as a person and what does travel mean to you today?

Jupiter Kayonga: I think it has given me a gift of connectivity with people, given a gift of knowledge, it's given me a gift of opening my mind and opening my awareness to my surroundings, be it my family, be it my friends, be it other community and other societies that are evolving around me.

Instilled in me a sense of wonder and curiosity and perpetual and infinite drive and love for people. And wisdom and quest of knowledge that it's unquenched, it's challenged me, biases, it's given me love of storytelling. It's all that I've compassed on in my travels. How can I use that well of knowledge and wisdom and give out into the world and give out to my community and give out to my friends and give out to my family and give out to other people who are less fortunate because I was a survivor of genocide.

Being given that opportunity to go out into the world and experience life, have something that is non palpable within your hands and distribute that love and light and around the world.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. I think that is a great point to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Jupiter, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Jupiter Kayonga: Let's get it. Let's

Matt Bowles: do it.

Of all the places you've now been, what are three? of your favorite destinations you'd most recommend other people should definitely check out?

Jupiter Kayonga: I'll put India there. I think India is a powerful civilization and country that we need to visit as a person. I'll put Ethiopia there. And last one, Iceland, even though I, there's so many countries.

Matt Bowles: All right, Jupiter, what are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you have not yet been to, highest on your list you'd most love to see.

Jupiter Kayonga: Mongolia, Gabon, Hawaii.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, Jupiter. Last question. I want you to put my audience on to some music. I have been spending a lot of time on the continent of Africa and putting my audience on to a lot of different Afro beats and so forth.

I know you're a big music fan and I want to open this up fairly broadly. I want you to name a song. your top five or at least five of your favorite African artists from the continent, whether they're specifically Afrobeat artists or another genre, but African musical artists from the continent that the listeners can go and check out and get into.

Jupiter Kayonga: All right, let's get it. Sona Jobarteh, she's a beautiful Gambian British singer. BurnaBoy and Amadou and Mariam, so they are Guinean singers. They are blind. Both are blind, I believe. And Angélique Kidjo. Oh my God, how could I forget the queen?

Matt Bowles: All right, Jupiter. I want you to let folks know how they can find you, connect with you, follow you, check out some of your photography.

How do you want people to come into your world?

Jupiter Kayonga: Uh, you can find me in Paris. When I'm not shooting, always shooting something in Paris or around the world. So, you can find me in Paris. If you ever come, just shoot me a DM on Instagram, [jupiterkonnections](#). That's the easiest way to get in touch with me.

Basically, you can also jump on my website, which is going to be revamped with more stories. [jupiterkonnections.com](#). I think that's the easiest ways to get through IG. And that is super quick.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We're going to link all of that up in the show notes. So, folks can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](#) there. You're going to find Jupiter's website, his Instagram handle, and links to everything we have discussed on this episode.

Jupiter, this was amazing, brother. Thank you so much for coming on the show,

Jupiter Kayonga: Brother, I can't thank you enough. It's been a real win. It's been a pleasure. It's been a blessing to connect with you, but yeah, thank you for creating such a beautiful space.

Thank you for the, giving me the opportunity to talk to your audience as well, and also the work that you do. And also, your curiosity is so mind blowing. And so, yeah, I'm really impressed and I'm really, uh, really happy to be able to connect with you on the internet. And hopefully we'll get to connect soon, face to face.

Matt Bowles: Absolutely, brother. We have to connect soon, either in Paris or somewhere around the world. That will happen. Thank you so much for coming on the show, Jupiter, and goodnight, everybody.