

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Ranika Koneru. She is a location-independent entrepreneur and the founder of [Cloud Connections](#), a niche travel company that enables digital nomads to experience the world's most epic cultural festivals, ranging from Carnival in Rio to Loy Krathong in Thailand, to the Holi Festival in India. [Cloud Connections](#) enable digital nomads to immerse themselves in vibrant local experiences. Learn the history and cultural significance of each event and directly participate in some of the world's most legendary cultural festivals. Originally from Texas, she has been a full-time digital nomad with no base for over three years and has now been to over 50 countries.

Ranika, welcome to the show.

Ranika Koneru: Hey, hey!

Matt Bowles: Let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today. Unfortunately, we are not in person, but we have agreed to make this a virtual wine night. So, let's also talk about what we are drinking. I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina on the East Coast of the United States today. And I have just opened a bottle of Malbec from Cahors, France. So, I'm going to be drinking through that during this interview, but where are you, Ranika, and what are you drinking?

Ranika Koneru: Well, I am sharing a mountainous background just like you. However, I am on the other side of the world in Bansko, Bulgaria, which is a couple of hours away from the capital, Sofia.

And I'm here for the Digital Nomad Festival, Bansko Fest. Which has been amazing so far. Second time back and I'm currently drinking a Cabernet Sauvignon and it is from Bulgaria, and Bulgaria has an amazing wine region.

Matt Bowles: It is a lot of people in the United States are not familiar with Bulgarian wines and I don't know them intimately, but Bulgarian is definitely a major wine-producing country.

And when I was there last year when you and I met. At the Nomad Fest last year, I was using one of my all-time favorite digital nomad apps that is on my phone, it's called Vivino. And what I love about this app is you can wind up in any country in the world where you know nothing at all about the wines.

Like just drop me in Bulgaria. I don't know about Bulgarian wines. What the app allows you to do is you just go into a store, and you just open up the camera feature on this app, and you can literally take a picture of any label of any bottle of wine, and it will pull up in the app what that wine is.

It'll tell you the grapes that are in the wine and the tasting notes and all this stuff. And then it will give you how many people have reviewed the wine and how many stars on a five-star scale that wine currently has, and it will tell you the average price for that bottle in a store. And so, this provides so much value to me because one, I can see which wines are actually going to be good, which ones have the really high star ratings.

And number two, when you understand what the average bottle price is in the store, you can go into restaurants, for example, right? And you can be like, let me take a look at the wines on this list and see which one I want. And sometimes you can assess value, right? Because obviously restaurant wines are of course more expensive than the same bottle would be in the store.

But is there a two times markup? Is there a five times markup? Which ones are you getting better value for? And so, for me, it's been a quintessential app if you like to travel around the world and drink wines and especially try wines that you know nothing about, which was the case for me when I was in Bulgaria and I was able to use it to find some really good Bulgarian wines.

But let's talk a little bit about your experience. At the Bansko Nomad Fest. I was there last year. I delivered a keynote address at the Nomad Fest last year. You and I met, we hung out and this year you went back, and you delivered a keynote address at the Nomad Fest. Can you share a little bit about what led up to that experience? Why did you want to do it and then how did it go? Because you just did it today.

Ranika Koneru: I know, and I survived. It's so cool because something that I heard from your interview with Matthias, who's the founder of the Bansko Nomad Fest here, he was somebody that wanted to encourage first-time speakers to come onto the stage.

So, there was a process for interviewing earlier, I would say back in around the March, or April timeframe, and I decided why not? Try and it led to this, and it led to creating a presentation and getting over a lot of the limiting beliefs and fears and realizing that I was able to accomplish something that a lot of people, including myself found really scary and yes, there's a lot of butterflies that were in my stomach, but it was amazing.

Matt Bowles: So, what was your process for preparing for this? So, this was your first time getting on stage in front of a large group and delivering a keynote address in front of an audience. And that is widely regarded as the number one fear. That most human beings have. And so for you, when you set out to say, I want to set a goal and I want to deliver a keynote address on a stage in front of an audience, and that was something that was important to you and you set out to do it, can you talk a little bit about once you applied and you got the opportunity, what was your preparation for that like, and then how did it feel once you finally finished it?

Ranika Koneru: Well, as far as preparation, I just realized I have so much valuable content and information to share with the, not just the nomad community, but like people that are trying to become or blossoming entrepreneurs and think skills that I've learned over the years.

So, I just realized creating that presentation and feel, is this too much, is every slide okay, is it just going to be too wordy and realizing that it's okay if it's not wordy, will I remember all the different queues. So, all these different things and elements that you have to realize before going in, especially as a new speaker, as somebody new into this, that hasn't had this sort of exposure before, and then being able to practice being able to share with friends, I think was really key and having people support you that come out to your keynote.

And I think having some of the familiar faces in the crowd just made things a little bit easier. And one of the things too, that the MC and the tech people have shared, it's like, okay, well, remember this is a community of people and they're here to support you and you're going to do great.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I think that's great. Right. Being able to get into a speaking opportunity in an environment where you know you will have a supportive audience and you know you will have friends there and then doing the prep work you took this seriously. And I know that because you and I were talking during the course you were preparing to give this talk, right? In terms of how much effort you put into preparing a

talk and then getting people's feedback on it and then rehearsing it and you know really taking it seriously to try to deliver that value and then going up and doing it.

And now you'll review the video, and you'll take notes on how that went. And then when you give your next talk, you know, you'll get your feedback and then implement that into your next talk and keep going. So yeah, I think that's awesome. I think that's really cool. And I'm so glad that you had that experience today at this event, and I think it'll lead to lots of other things. So that's amazing.

Ranika, I want to go back through now a little bit and give folks your backstory and start there and then get into how your travel journey and your entrepreneurial journey and everything else evolved.

But let's start at the very beginning. Can you talk a little bit about your cultural heritage? Where your parents are from, and then where you grew up.

Ranika Koneru: So, I have a South Indian background. My parents moved to the States from India. So, my mom came over in the 80s when she got married to my dad. And then my dad actually came over in the 1960s to rural Indiana.

There weren't a lot of Indians at all at that time. And so, it was really interesting and difficult because just the education and the knowledge of this culture, especially in the sixties was super confusing and I remember him sharing it like, "Oh, Indiana". And when he was back in India, I was like, oh, is Indiana where all the Indians go to America?

And I'm glad I did not grow up there because I'm very much a sun chaser. And I've heard that it can get to negative 30 degrees. So, I can't imagine growing up in Indiana, especially,

Matt Bowles: You know, I was just out in Indiana about a month ago and I interviewed our mutual friend, [Nora Dunn](#) in Indianapolis. And so, for folks that are interested in that, we actually do chat about Indianapolis, and it is actually a very cool city.

There's a lot of very cool stuff about it, but yes, in the wintertime, by goodness, does it get cold Ranika? So, talk a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up.

Ranika Koneru: So, my dad decided to join the air force and the military. So, I was actually born at Air Force Base, which is basically where the president flies into or other diplomats.

So, I feel like it's such a cool place to be born. It's technically the nation's Capital. And then from there, my dad moved around with the military. He found a way though, to stay in San Antonio. So, we moved there when I was five and I basically stayed there until I headed out to college.

Matt Bowles: And how was your experience growing up in Texas? What was it like culturally for you? Was there much of an Indian community there?

Ranika Koneru: So, because my mom just, came to India from when she was in her 20s. She very much wanted to connect with the Indian community, especially the community that was able to speak her language, which is Telugu. And so, I feel like she found all the Indians there that could do that.

So, I would be able to hang out with some of their daughters and they all went to different schools and were in different neighborhoods. And everything in the US for public school is zoned by where you live. So, growing up, going to public school for a part of it, I was the only Indian person there, and it was difficult

because I was unsure about myself and my identity because in Texas, it is similar or close to the border of Mexico.

There's a lot of Hispanic people there. And so oftentimes I would get confused with that being Hispanic. And I just didn't understand who I was or what I was. And I don't feel like there was enough education, even in the early nineties or maybe mid to late nineties, Indian culture, it's so much more popularized these days, but it was a bit of a struggle for me and growing up and not realizing that I was even Asian.

Matt Bowles: How did that evolve as you got older? How did your Indian cultural heritage and maybe what was practiced at the home with your parents and stuff like that, how did you sort of navigate through that and what is your relationship now, for example, with your Indian identity?

Ranika Koneru: I think I definitely struggled during my childhood and growing up time. I feel like I didn't have a lot of friends and some friends that I would bring over to my place, just never wanted to come back again because they were saying, oh, it smelled like curry. It was just so intense. I definitely was not that popular kid on the block by any means.

And it's difficult growing up in an area where you're the only Indian person in your school or in your place. And I mean, yes, I did. See other Indians, thanks to my mom and the friends there. But I definitely did struggle with a lot of my confidence and feeling I wasn't worthy and feeling these other people were better than me.

And I felt very much an odd person out, but I did have one good friend that was in middle school and her parents were able to host a lot of exchange students. And so, there's people from Japan and Germany and Israel that she hosted. And I think having that exposure from early on just made me realize and understand a lot more about the diversity.

And so, it helped to shape my love for travel and being able to realize that there is a bigger world out there and just something a little bit more than this one small community within San Antonio. And so, it was just opening up my eyes there.

Matt Bowles: And how did your world travels begin? Can you sort of take us on that journey?

I know you studied abroad in college, maybe share a little bit about that and what the impact was on you.

Ranika Koneru: Sure. Well, I mean, I'd say first off at six months, I got a passport to go to India. So, a lot of my time when I was little was actually over there. I mean, that just felt so normal to me. But then in college, I was able to go to go to Spain at 19. And it was just so shaping to live and breathe and understand different cultures and to actually get better at Spanish because Texas, because it's so close to Mexico, you always get Spanish lessons, but you don't really use that. And being in a country where you have to speak Spanish because you're Spanish even if it's basic is better than their English really pushes you out of your comfort zone to just talk to people. And of course, it's such a wine-loving culture that it was so easy to get into the wine. Well, I think back then I was more into sangria.

Put the fruits in there and it was just nice because there was a Rasmus, there was a lot of Valencia actually had a lot of student population that we're all trying to learn and be there for Spanish. And just, I thought the program I went with was just amazing. And then, it was the third largest city. So not being in Madrid, not being in Barcelona, you weren't around a lot of tourists, and so you were really having an enriching

experience. Because it was still a big city, but it didn't have the international draw, so it was a lot more local.

Matt Bowles: And then after you studied abroad in Spain, you got the opportunity to do an internship in Beijing, China. Which is incredibly, culturally different from either Spain, India or the United States. Can you talk about what that experience was like for you when you got there?

Ranika Koneru: I think that was really the turning point of where I felt like I was growing up because I was 19 and had that rich cultural experience in Spain. But then when I went to Beijing, I was meeting people who were 23, and 24, which is wild to think now that that felt so old to me back then. And I was learning these people were from England, Scotland, and people from Singapore and just really being immersed or like in France, Wales.

It was so cool. At that time, I remember there was only a handful of Americans and it was mostly with this program I did. And it was just super cool how much I learned and I grew from them and it just really advanced me in so many tremendous ways. And I just felt really lucky to have been part of that experience.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. And then you got to spend time in Korea as well, right?

Ranika Koneru: Yeah. I loved Korea.

Matt Bowles: I loved Korea too. I went and I was in Seoul for about five weeks. I went down to Busan for about a long weekend, went up to the DMZ, to the border with North Korea, which was super politically fascinating to go and see that, my goodness, but what were your thoughts on Korea? How was that for you?

Ranika Koneru: So, I was studying management information systems a blend between software meets business. So, it was more of a technology class, which Seoul and the rest of Korea are just really eons ahead of the world. So, it was great to see that we got to go to the different companies, Samsung and LG, and see their facilities and have the Korean hospitality shown to us, which they are such lovely people, especially like they love guests, and they love hosting. And then going to the DMZ was really fun.

I remember just being a little silly and just trying to put my foot over the line. And they were saying that it would be in high consequences, but I really got more of a scowl and, but it was intense, and it was interesting too, because they do place such a predominance on height and to be part of the military or the forces there, the guys had to be over the certain height. And just to show credibility.

Matt Bowles: So, after you spent time in East Asia and you had your experience in China, you had your experience in Korea, all that, when you were coming back to Texas, did you experience reverse culture shock?

Ranika Koneru: Oh, it was so sad because I was going back to Texas and then I was going back to Tallahassee for school and I just had these amazing experiences and I was 19 and I remember I'm like, oh, great. Now I'm about to turn 20 and I can't have sangria anymore. And I feel like I was just missing being around these incredible people where I was learning and growing so much more during that timeframe. Then I feel like it is several years of being at my university in the US or, or back in Texas.

Matt Bowles: So, I want to talk to you then from that, once you got a taste of it and you were totally enamored and enthralled and invigorated by the travel experiences and the cultural immersion and all of

that kind of stuff, and you loved it. You wanted to do that. It was a little while between that time. And you actually becoming a full-time digital nomad and traveling the world with no base and all that kind of stuff.

Can you talk a little bit about that journey and the transition and how you eventually were able to become a full-time nomad with no base?

Ranika Koneru: Yeah, so I remember the year after I had a really cool internship back in the nation's capital with the FBI. Had to do a top-secret clearance, and, felt like I was a big deal during that, but it was cool, but it just didn't feel enriching, and I knew that I always did want to travel, and I have done trips throughout the past, but the US is notoriously for the lack of vacation time.

And so every time I would go and try to save all my time and energy and money to be able to take trips, I was able to do Kilimanjaro, climb that when I went to Tanzania, I would say the perfect recipe to an amazing trip is having that bit of adventure, doing something monumental, like Kilimanjaro, and then we did a safari and then relax at the beach in Zanzibar.

So, it's like a, a three-step method. So, like these little, like little trips along the way, I remember on my 27th birthday, I got laid off from a startup. And so, I decided to just book a one-way ticket to Panama City in Panama, and then went down to the San Blas by a boat and then came to Columbia and then did four and a half months throughout South America. So, I'm like, okay, how do I repeat this? This.

Matt Bowles: I like your style, Ranika. I actually just summited Kilimanjaro over this past year. I spent about seven months on the continent over the last year, one of which was in Tanzania, and we summited Achilles. So that was a really amazing but also intense experience. And what was your experience like?

Ranika Koneru: I remember getting there as a hassle. I remember we missed our flights. And we were like, oh my gosh, are we going to make it? And they were kind enough to let us start after. Despacito was my song. That's when it just came out. It was so much fun. There was like a group of Spanish people.

So, I was like, oh, I get to practice my Spanish again with these guys that were like hanging out. And it was a seven-day trek. I did the Machame trek. And it was so cool to see all the different changes in the vegetation and the landscape. And I remember on summit day. It was so hard waking up at midnight being freezing cold, just taking step after step.

I don't know how long I could keep this up, but it's just one step in front of the other. I might pass out right here. We'll see. And just like that summit push. But I remember the stars were so clear. It was insanely beautiful, frigid, but beautiful. And when the sun started rising, we saw Mars so bright and it was like, oh, what's a red star?

I'm like, "Oh, that's Mars". "What? It's so clear from here". And that to this day is still one of the best, reddest sunrises I've ever seen. And we got there just as it was rising. At the top.

Matt Bowles: That's incredible. Yeah. I did a podcast episode where I interviewed [Tammer Abiyu](#) who summited with me. He was a guy I was traveling with at the time, and we summited together.

And then afterward we debriefed it on the podcast and talked about it. And it was truly an incredibly unique and spectacular experience, but that summit day or summit night, however, you want to call it is incredibly intense while you're in it, but it is so amazingly rewarding. And then after you've done it and you've summited Kilimanjaro; it really feels like an incredible accomplishment.

Ranika Koneru: Yeah, oh my gosh. I lost both of my toenails though on the way down because my boots were just a little too small and then like okay, but the scree skiing you go five and a half days up, and then it's all of a sudden one and a half days down. I'm like what?

Matt Bowles: So, let's talk a little bit about your nomad journey.

You have been going three-plus years now with no base, traveling around the world, living your best life. Can you talk a little bit about some tips that you have for sustaining this lifestyle over the long term in a way that is exciting and joyful and fulfilling?

Ranika Koneru: Sustaining it, I feel it can be difficult for some people because it's hard to get into a routine.

But something that I do in every single place is that usually, I have in the past tried to get there on the weekends and like then get everything kind of set up for Monday, but now I have more of that time freedom. So usually a lot of places, unfortunately, close things on Sunday. I usually Google research everything where I'm staying and like where the gyms are and finding ways to get into routine, where's the coworking, where's the coffee shops and cafes.

And I search all of that beforehand so that as soon as I'm there, I'm able to scope it out on Monday and get ready to go. And I do prioritize health and fitness while being on the road. And I think that making sure that you can do things that are your routine that you want to do back at home and finding ways to do that while you're abroad is super essential in maintaining this lifestyle.

Because in the beginning, when I started, it wasn't like best for my health because I was just trying to drink a lot and maintain connections with other people and it could get you in a rut, but if you're able to put these different structures in place and focus on your health, focus on building that routine with your business or your job while traveling and realizing that.

Sometimes, honestly, I loved working nights because then you have the whole day to do activities and it is such an untapped sweet spot. And I highly recommend trying that because when you have your whole day to do activities it's also you get to do cooler things that are more healthy and then usually at night when you're working That's usually when you'd socialize and you're maintaining these healthy habits

Matt Bowles: Totally agree, and I think also depending on what time zone you're in, and if you have any time specific work obligations, like if you're able to create a lifestyle that's completely asynchronous and you can just work whenever you want, that's ideal, but if you're not entirely there yet, sometimes you might have time obligations where you have to do something at a particular time on certain days, and then what you can do is you can just structure your life around that.

Whether it's working later and then doing more stuff in the day or some other thing, when you find yourself in another time zone, you know, I remember one of the first times I went to East Asia, I went on the remote year work travel program. And there was a number of people on my program that were required to work American business hours.

And we were in Malaysia for our first month. And so, there's 12-hour time difference, right? And so, if they were required to work nine to five, American hours, that's 9 pm to 5 am Malaysia hours. But they wanted to do this trip so bad, and they wanted to experience Malaysia and then Thailand and then Cambodia.

I mean, we were there for three months in Asia, right? That's the first three months of our trip. They were like, okay, well, I'll just work those hours. And then what happened was really quite amazing. There were probably eight or nine people that had that schedule, and we called them the night crew. And they just made this incredible lifestyle out of it.

So, they would like to show up at the workspace at 9 pm. They'd wear, one guy had cookie monster pajamas, bottoms he would wear, and this kind of stuff, right? And they would just work from 9 pm to 5 am. And then at 5 am, they would have this ritual and they would just go out and they would get breakfast and they would watch the sunrise and they would do sunrise yoga, do this whole thing.

And then they would go to sleep. And then they would wake up at three o'clock in the afternoon. And then they had the whole afternoon to go explore the city. Then they could go out to a really nice dinner, you know, have dinner at a really cool restaurant or whatever until nine. And then they just roll into the workspace at nine.

And so, they just made that schedule work for them in Asia. And then on the weekend, they were ready to party from 9 pm to 5 am. Because that was the schedule that they were on. So, they could just go to the club, and it was the perfect hour, and they were already set. So, I think there's all kinds of ways that you can experiment with those different types of timeframes when you work, either because you need to, and you're in a different time zone, or for you, to your point, you just want to do it that way, even if you have the choice. And so, I think there's so many options in this lifestyle.

One of the questions that I get a lot, though, Ranika, that I want to ask you about is people ask me about dating as a digital nomad. How the heck does that work? They ask me. And so now that you've been in this lifestyle for three years, what are your reflections and perhaps any tips you have about dating in the digital nomad lifestyle?

Ranika Koneru: Well, I would say that dating just in general, as a topic is never easy, no matter if you are a nomad or are in a more, a fixed location kind of lifestyle.

And some things that I've learned as being a digital nomad is that the ideal situation is to find another nomad because I have tried dating somebody when I was in Cape Town and have realized, okay, well, I like you, but you like Cape town, you've rarely left this place. And it doesn't sound like you're able to want to leave.

So, it's me and my effort to have to make this a work in trying to go to this country, and there are lots of limitations. A lot of times as a nomad for a country, unless there is a nomad visa, you can really only be in a place for 90 days. And so, it is difficult usually to have a relationship. And usually, most nomads do have wanderlust.

So, they don't want to be tied down. It's like the whole point of being a nomad. And one of the talks here is a nomad is just an expat with commitment issues. And I just thought that was cute, but that's why it is ideal to date another nomad, but sometimes also their plans are super different. You might want to be in Asia and they're actually, I'm going to be more in South America this time.

So, also dating another nomad, it's really an all-or-nothing kind of scenario because when you are to conventional dating, you guys would have different homes and get to meet each other at whatever frequency, whether that be a dinner date or have a date night.

And it's just more chill. And versus with being a dating, another digital nomad, it's like, you want to travel to another place, like, oh, great. I have a partner I could save and, or this place is better with one bedroom. Let's just do that. And you're always together all the time, all the way with each other.

And so, it can be really intense. And so, what I've also found is that a lot of nomads can be poly and be like, "Oh, well, hey. I'm just traveling around. I'm meeting you here for the moment". So, let's just be open to more open relationships. And so, it's something that I've also seen as a common trend, but I feel like I love, I have polyfriends and love poly people, but it's not something that has been for me.

And that's also been a barrier and difficulty because I think again if the whole commitment issues thing, but there are amazing digital nomad couples. And when you find them and you realize they're able to hang out with each other for so long, some recipes to success I've seen as they're together for three months and then they're apart for three months and they're together again, and they find a recipe of spending enough time and being together all the time in every moment, and then having that separation and being able to work on their own things.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And I find those digital nomad couples and like you, Ranika, I am enamored with them. And I have actually interviewed both people as a nomad couple on the podcast. I interviewed, I remember, for example, [Santiago Sosa](#) and his wife, [Vicky Zapata](#).

And I was like, I want to interview you both because you're both Amazing and brilliant and talented entrepreneurs and incredibly fascinating, well-traveled nomads and you're married and your business partners. I'm like, all right, I want separate interviews. I want each of your stories. I want each of your perspectives on how this came about and how this works because you're madly in love with each other.

You have an absolute blast with each other all the time. And You travel together in your business partners. So, let's break that down and talk about how it works. And so, I literally did, right? I had a podcast interview with each of them and they're both amazing and dear friends of mine and incredibly amazing humans.

But I always ask those kinds of questions. When I see people that are really in amazing situations, I'm like, let's talk about how this amazing situation came about and what you're proactively doing to keep it amazing on a regular ongoing basis, right? And so always super fascinating stuff and have talked to a bunch of people about that on the podcast.

So, I appreciate you sharing some of your experiences and reflections on that. The other thing I want to ask you about, Ranika, is your interest in glass blowing and how those experiences around the world have gone for you. Can you share a little bit about that?

Ranika Koneru: Yeah. So, I remember when I went to Italy, like when I studied abroad in Spain, just did a little trip there and went, there's like the three islands in Italy.

I like Murano, Burano and uh, Vercelli, but oh, it's been a while. So, I think those are it. And then Murano is the one with glass. And I just remember seeing glassblowers for the first time and being so fascinated because you're combining fire and heat with creating glass and something so beautiful.

And so, it was just so entranced. And I lived in San Diego for three years and then had the opportunity to pursue some things. And then it was the more artsy neighborhood of Barrio Logan, which was up and coming. So, it was really cool to be able to go there and to be around other artists and to kind of pursue this more niche hobby and to actually get to create.

The difficulty though, is that it is very heavy to maneuver. And so usually in a glass blowing. And you always need a partner, and you need access to the fire and the urn. So, they had to also be in very specific locations. So, I tried that in San Diego for like a year. And it was so fun to make different objects and glasses and functional pieces and presents for friends.

And it's been something harder to find when I travel, but whenever I see an opportunity, I get to try the most recent time when it was in Lisbon last year.

Matt Bowles: And then once you create a piece you mentioned, you're a nomad, so you're traveling around. You're not able to bring all of these pieces with you or store them somewhere. So, what do you typically do once you have created a piece?

Ranika Koneru: It's hard because it's so delicate too. And you want to make sure that it's taken care of, but I would usually try to find a way to give it to a local or give it to a friend who would be interested. But usually, my friends are nomads so, they're in the same boat.

Matt Bowles: Well, that's nice, right? You can go to a place, you can have a local experience doing glass blowing in a local space, and then you can create something and have that experience of creative production and artistry, and then you can donate it and just give it to a local person and have that be sort of one of your contributions to the place where you're staying.

So, I think that's amazing. That's really cool. All right, Ranika, I now want to talk to you about your company, [Cloud Connections](#), because you are doing some really incredible things and giving digital nomads an opportunity to experience some of the most Epic and legendary cultural festivals around the world.

So, let's talk about that. Can you share a little bit, maybe just first of all, how this idea came about for you to start [Cloud Connections](#)?

Ranika Koneru: So, I've been thinking and reflecting on one of my dreams has been growing up and it's really been to experience culture in places to the fullest. And I've always been so intrigued with festivals and India, for example, has some of, uh, a lot of the world's festivals from Diwali to Holi to a camel festival, and they take place.

All around the country. And it has trickled into many places around the world with some of these celebrations. And so, I've seen that, and I've wanted to experience that. And then I wanted to be able to share that. And actually, I would say it was coming to Bansko last year, which kind of, uh, catapulted the idea and the dream that I had into like, why not make this a reality?

Last year I went to Carnival in Rio, which was fun. Interesting. Because they had two, there was one in February, but it was technically canceled, and the government redid it in April. So, I created this WhatsApp group and there were over 50 people who were interested in going to Carnival. And I was like, okay, well, clearly people want to go, and they want to do this.

And it's not just my dream, but a lot of people have, wait, I want to go check out the greatest celebration in the world. Let's do it. And so, I decided I was going to create this company called [Cloud Connections](#), which takes you as a nomad. Cause I'm just super passionate about building the community as well.

Creating these experiences and having them come out to Carnival and realizing, well, all these people are like, I can't make it out this specific year, but if I have this notice for next year, then I am so in, and so it was following a dream.

Matt Bowles: I love that. And I love that you also are focused on educating people about the historical and cultural significance of these festivals and giving them an opportunity to really immerse and participate in these festivals in a substantive way.

And I'd like to start maybe just talking about India. I actually went to Diwali in India in 2017, I went to the state of Punjab, and I went to the capital in Amritsar, and I celebrated Diwali there in 2017 and it was so amazing and special and wonderful. And I just remembered this, I was so struck and taken aback by the kindness of the people there.

Our Airbnb host came over to our place and he said, who will you be spending Diwali with? What family or friends do you have here in Amritsar that you'll be spending Diwali with? And we're like, well, we actually don't have friends or family here. We're just visiting. And he said, well, then you'll come to my place, and you'll spend it with my family.

I'll be back to pick you up at this time. So, it was literally his extended family and then us, like that was it. Like we were the only ones who were not part of his and his extended family who were at his personal house and they had cooked this massive feast and they invited us to the prayer portion of it.

And then the eating portion of it and the socializing portion of it. And then to the rooftop where they were lighting off fireworks and had this whole display and the whole city is lit up and it was just us and his extended family. I mean, it was one of the most incredible things that I had ever experienced.

And it was like, oh, I want to go and have this experience of Diwali in India. And then it turned into just so much more than I ever could have imagined because of how kind the people were and then what a local and immersive cultural experience we actually got well beyond what we had thought of just being there during this time.

No, you're going to be in a family's house at their table, doing all of their family rituals with them. And it was one of the most incredible, heartfelt, meaningful experiences I've had in all of my travels. I mean, I continue to tell people about it, and I have so much love and appreciation for India and Indian people.

It's just amazing every time I go, but I have not yet been to the holy festival. And I have of course, heard amazing things about it from people that have been, but for folks, and maybe there's listeners who have never even heard of the Holi Festival in India. Can you share a little bit about the significance of it, the historical and cultural significance of it, why it happens, what it means, but also what is it like attending the Holi Festival in India? What can people expect?

Ranika Koneru: So, like the Holi Festival was born through a lot of different Hindu mythology, and it is a triumph of good over evil. So, like classic tales and its particularly associated with the legends of Lord Krishna and it's where he's playing with all the different colors, um, with a different goddess in his village.

And it's just fascinating. Cause like, this is one of like a couple of legends. So, it's either that one, or there's like another story with somebody named Holika, where the Indian mythologists are saying that's where the origins came from, but it's been celebrated for centuries. It's just so cool about some of these cultural festivals is that some of them are new, but a lot of the festivals, especially within Asian countries have

been around for so long, and it just incorporates a lot of the different traditions, similar to Diwali with having prayer and food and commemorating and sharing with family.

And it's also the celebration of joy because of the arrival of a spirit. So, the Holi festival next year is towards the end of March, but the dates do usually change, but it's like a time for renewing and rejuvenating and feeling good about life. And so that's pretty exciting. But the other cool thing is that India has this reputation of having a caste system and different barriers.

So, this festival allows people of any class or, uh, caste to let that all go and to just be able to celebrate and enjoy each other during this time. So, I know that a lot of these higher these are suspended, but it is so fun because it's literally just throwing colors and paints and what's called the goulash, the powders, other people, and just creating an atmosphere.

It's like a very much a rainbow. And ideally, you should wear white and then basically have your shirt painted with the myriads of explosive colors. And then sometimes in different places, you can even have water balloons or water guns, but India is a very vibrant country. So, you'd expect to have a lot of music and dance during this timeframe.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, if folks have never heard of the Holi festival in India, you should immediately do a Google image search for it, or you can just go to the [Cloud Connections](#) website because you have some incredible pictures from the Holi festival there and just the visual aesthetics of the way that everybody is just totally doused in colors.

And it is just like this amazing, remarkable visual experience just from looking at the pictures. And so, it is actually something that's super high on my list to do for sure. I have noted down the March 2024 dates, and I know that you are offering an opportunity for people to go there with [Cloud Connections](#) to experience the holy festival with you personally on that trip in 2024, which is going to be absolutely amazing.

I want to talk about another festival that you also take people to in Thailand. Now, just for context, I have spent a number of months in Thailand. I have been numerous times. I have spent many months there, but I have not been to the Yi Peng or the Loy Krathong festivals in Thailand. I have seen pictures, of course, but I have not yet been.

So that is super high on my list, but for people that have never even heard of these festivals. Ranika, can you share a little bit about, again, the history and cultural significance of these festivals, what they mean, but then also the visual aesthetics when you're there, what does it look like? What is the experience like?

Ranika Koneru: Sure. So, in Thailand, especially in Northern Thailand, or Chiang Mai, there's not one, but two festivals that happen towards the end of the year. And with Yi Peng, that is also the lantern festival where you float a lantern. So, it has origins within the Lanna kingdom, and you are able to float lanterns that are made with bamboo.

And the coolest part about this is that it's about releasing your misfortunes and negative energies into the air. And this was something I wanted to tie in with wellness and being able to let go of things that no longer serve you and just have more of a healing experience. Because that part of Thailand is also really known for meditation and having like monks and then, of course, being world renowned for their Thai massages.

But it's also able to bring in a lot of good luck and happiness for the upcoming year since it is taking place close to the end of November or closer to January. And then the Loy Krathong festival, which is so amazing

because you basically get two festivals in one takes more place on a lunar calendar and it's the full moon of the 12th lunar calendar month, which usually is in November this time around it happens to be that way.

So, it ties really well together. So, it's a really lucky opportunity. This one has more traditions with the, uh, the Brahmanic tradition of respecting the river goddess. So, what you do is craft a boat, and you can work with the locals to do this. I have an ex-experience we're going to meet some of the artists in Chiang Mai and then be able to learn from them and these local artists and then craft a boat together to float down the river. And so 'Loy' literally means float. And then 'Krathong' is a lotus shaped vessel. Or you're able to place a candle in it and people from all over come to gather around the river.

And here in Chiang Mai, it's called the Ping River. And this way floating with this candle is a way to pay respect to Buddha.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the things that I really love about the way that you have structured these trips and the opportunities for people to experience these festivals is, number one, you're doing it with a level of historical, and cultural education. And you're helping people to participate in these festivals respectfully and appropriately and also to have a complete blast while they're doing it, right?

So, to learn about it and also to have an incredibly good time while they're doing it. And to be able to cater to the digital nomad community who also need to have good Wi-Fi in the accommodations while they're at these things and everything else. And so, you've really attended to all of these different aspects in terms of giving people a really substantive way to immerse themselves in a respectful way to participate fully in these festivals and to have an amazing time and create an amazing memory.

So, I love all of that. Can you share a little bit about what the upcoming opportunities are for people to participate in these events and what the itineraries are like that they can expect if they were to participate in a [Cloud Connections](#) event?

Ranika Koneru: Sure. So, we have the upcoming one for the Yi Peng and the Loy Krathong festivals in Chiang Mai, starting on November 23rd up until December 2nd, and it is going to be an incredibly immersive experience. I've got some locals there in Chiang Mai. They're going to help us understand a lot of the different traditions. And then of course, being able to communicate with Thai. So, we get to really immerse with that local culture, which I think is so important for nomads, because sometimes you get into a bubble and what you were sharing with your story in India.

Having somebody take you in and feel part of their family is something that words can't describe. So that is what I'm trying to do and share with, uh, just a larger group of people and also having them connect and immerse themselves within not just like the festivals in Chiang Mai, but some of like the most important highlights.

What I also want to do, and share is to find ways to be more sustainable. So, for example, I am partnering with an elephant sanctuary that makes sure that a lot of the elephants are getting overstimulated by people. So, we'll find a more ethical way to treat the elephants when we go and visit them, as well as being able to just talk, and enjoy ourselves more with the locals, as well as.

Having some more of those interactive experiences. And of course, going to the night market, being able to walk and enjoy one of the top nomad cities, especially in Thailand.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Listen, I think it's very likely you're going to find me on one of these trips. I mean, I would love to go to India with you, Ranika.

I would love to experience the holy festival with you. I mean, I can't really imagine a better way to experience it or someone that I would rather experience it with. And so, I think you commit so much time and effort into really understanding these festivals and you help people to engage with them in a really meaningful and substantive way.

This isn't just some typical tourist trip. And so, I really appreciate that. That's how I like to travel. So, I think folks are very likely to find me on one of these trips. They're definitely going to find you on these trips because you're not just setting them up and then sending other people to lead them.

You're actually leading people on these trips and going with them. So, people are going to actually get to meet you and hang out with you in person. If folks want to learn about the specific dates of when these are going to be, see the full itineraries, and actually sign up for, or at least have a consultation about going on one or more of your upcoming Cloud Connection trips, how can they connect with you, and can you give them a little bit of a discount for being a Maverick show listener?

Ranika Koneru: Oh my gosh. Of course, you have to for The Maverick Show, but absolutely be delighted to do that. And if you're interested, then yes, I do have a website, it's called cloudconnections.co. If you head, there and can look, see it on the upcoming trips. And you can apply now. And so that'll just, uh, share some different preferences that you have with your interests. And then you can go ahead and book a Calendly call with me. And then we can just go through some of your questions and get you booked in.

And what I'm offering is a special discount is where there's like a referral code or affiliate code in the Calendly link. When you call, you just place the code MAVERICK for The Maverick Show, and then you'll be able to get an amazing discount.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. So, we are going to link that up in [the show notes](#).

You can use the discount code MAVERICK in the registration when you sign up for the call and there you will get and lock in your discount. So that's amazing.

Ranika, I want to ask you. A couple more questions in terms of just overall reflections on your nomad life and your life of travel up to this point. When you think back on all the different travel that you've done, 50 plus countries you've been to and all the experiences that you had, what impact do you think that all of that travel has had on you as a person?

Ranika Koneru: I just feel so lucky. And every time I'm able to have the opportunity to see a new country and experience a new place, I also realize so much of the similarities of the world.

And you feel that when you go to a new place is going to be so exciting and different, but then you see how some of the people are or how some of the locations are, and it just makes you feel reminiscent of another place. And it's incredible how you can start feeling the more you travel to new places, the more relatable they are to others and feel like it is very much a small world.

Matt Bowles: And why do you continue to travel? Why are you so passionate about this yourself and supporting and helping other people into doing it today? What does travel mean to you?

Ranika Koneru: What travel means to me is the ability to break down barriers, especially now in this world, that's more connected than ever, and learning and exposing myself to other people and then having them exposed to me so that they understand where I'm coming from, they're able to understand places and people from Texas or from the US are like this and just being able to continually get educated and then educate people in all sorts of different walks of life.

Matt Bowles: I love that. All right. Ranika, at this point, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Ranika Koneru: Let's bring some thunder while you're at it.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that has maybe significantly impacted you over the years you'd most recommend people should read?

Ranika Koneru: I absolutely love *You Are a Badass* by Jen Sincero. It was probably the first kind of motivational mindset book that I've read. And it was just the writing and how she is able to just cuss and swear. And it was just like, hell yes, I am badass. Let's go. And it was very beneficial.

Matt Bowles: All right. What is one travel hack? That you use that you can recommend to people.

Ranika Koneru: Okay. Always carry multiple copies of your passport picture because I lost my passport in Amsterdam, and the process I was bawling, crying, and I'm like, I'm never going to be able to go home to America.

I don't think Amsterdam wants me. Because I'm almost about to run out of Schengen days. How do I do this? So good, like an emergency service. And having a picture of your old passport really helps to beat up that process and get home.

Matt Bowles: All right, Ranika, if you could have dinner with any one person who's currently alive today that you've never met, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation, who would you choose?

Ranika Koneru: So, I would choose Pamela Reif. She is a German fitness influencer and I have been like following a lot of her different workouts. It's always something it's been 10 to 15 minutes and been super easy to do while traveling and you get into the workout right away. And it's something that I prioritize while on the road.

So, I just admire her ability to be consistent and always find new ways to motivate and share those workouts. So, I'd love to get to meet her.

Matt Bowles: Okay. Knowing. Everything that you know now if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Ranika?

Ranika Koneru: Oh, so young. I think that I cared so much about what people thought about me at that age and the confidence I had was nowhere near where it is now. So, to like to go back and realize who gives a damn what other people think, you are amazing and that you need to find that way in life on your own and you don't have to go with the flow. Like you go on your own terms.

Matt Bowles: All right. Of all the places you have now been in the world, what are three of your top favorite destinations you would most recommend other people should definitely check out.

Ranika Koneru: As far as countries, I would say Spain was the most impactful because of where I grew a lot.

And there's just so much diversity in the place there. So definitely Spain. And then I really appreciate Mexico. Like being in Texas is like just in my backyard. But there's just so much to see and do in so many different cities. And I underrated it. It's just beautiful. And I also love Croatia. I celebrated my 30th birthday in Dubrovnik and it was just charmed by the city walls and also a big Game of Thrones fan.

So, it was just like, Oh my gosh, I'm here in King's landing. This is amazing.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. Good picks. All right. Ranika last. Question. What are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you have not yet been highest on your list, you'd most love to see.

Ranika Koneru: Okay. So, I'd say New Zealand because I've just heard the scenery is breathtaking and I heard it's a great place for zorbing, which was basically being in a hamster ball running around.

And then Bhutan because they are some of the highest peaks in the world, 8,000 meters and untouched and the country is measured by gross domestic happiness. And I'm just fascinated to understand that culture. And it's one of the most dangerous airports in the world to fly into. So, I feel like it'd be really exciting.

And then I'm really fascinated with North Korea. I've literally been wanting to go ever since I went to South Korea. And I know it's not a place currently allowed, uh, to go for Americans right now. And a lot of people might think I'm a little nut for wanting to go there, but I am just purely fascinated and want to understand that country more.

Matt Bowles: You know, you and I have some mutual friends that have been to North Korea, including the podcasting living legend, [Palle Bo](#) who's microphone you are episode.

We have to give Palle a shout out. First of all, [Palle Bo](#). Was episode #15 of The Maverick Show. Everybody should go back to listen to it. He embarked on his digital nomad journey at age 50 with the intention of traveling full-time without a base and going to every country in the world. And he is an absolute legend.

So, I interviewed him in episode #15 of The Maverick Show. He was one of the initial early pillar episodes. He's still podcasting. He, so go check him out on episode 15. He is there with you at the BANSKO Nomad Fest. You are using his microphone to do this interview. But one of the things that Palle and I talked about on that episode #15 was his experience in North Korea and what it was like when he went there.

So, he has an incredible resource on number one, what it's like, but number two, how to potentially set up a trip and to go there. And I've talked about that actually with subsequent podcast guests that I've had on The Maverick Show who have been to North Korea and have shared some of their reflections.

So, there's definitely a good bit of information on that and some good resources if you're looking to find a way to go and do that. But those other two are really high on my list as well. I've never been to Bhutan, super high on my list. And I've also never been to New Zealand, which of course, everybody that goes to raves about and all of that.

So, I think those are amazing pics, Ranika. And I think it's an amazing way to close out this episode. I want you to let people know how they can find you, how they can follow you on social media, how they can connect with you, how they can learn more about [CloudConnections](#). Once again, you know, if they want

to see the itineraries, the dates, what exactly they're going to be doing on these trips and then schedule the consult with you, maybe to get even more questions clarified. How do you want people to come into your world?

Ranika Koneru: Well, I absolutely love being able to chat and share and talk about festivals and connections all day long. So, if you're interested, I'm more than happy to make the time and to get something set up with you. And I do have that [Calendly link](#) that's available through my website, [cloudconnections.co](#).

So even if you're not a hundred percent sure and you're leaning towards it, or you just have questions, uh, that's completely okay. Just like, feel free to book some time with me and it would just be lovely to have a chat with you and just to understand where you are in this nomad journey, as well as I do have an [Instagram](#) account, it's *RainbowRani*.

And that is also where you can message me. And if you're in Bansko or anywhere else that I go while I'm nomading, let's grab a tea or a coffee.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. We are going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#). So, folks can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](#). Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. There you're going to see all of the social media handles for how to follow Ranika. You're going to see the URL for her website, how to register for a completely free call with her. And remember to put in the discount code MAVERICK to get your discount on any of her festival trips.

And I think you're probably going to see me on one of those festival trips before too long, because you are doing a lot of stuff.

I've been to the carnival in Rio, but I have not been to Loy Krathong in Thailand. I have not been to the holy festival in India. They've been super high on my bucket list for quite some time. And so, I think you are creating some amazing opportunities for people like me and others to go on these trips and get to hang out with you while we're there, which is super amazing and awesome.

So, we're going to link all of that up. Just go to [themaverickshow.com](#), go to [the show notes](#) for this episode, and there you'll see direct links to that and everything else we've discussed on this episode.

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

Ranika Koneru: Oh, thanks for having me. I feel so good. Just like been rolling after that keynote, and it's been so amazing to like, be able to continue that with you.

Matt Bowles: Well, I'm super happy to share your special day with you. I'll be at virtual, but at least to close out this evening for you with a bottle of wine and then an amazing conversation.

So, thank you so much for being on The Maverick Show and good night, everybody.