

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Robin Who. She is a location-independent entrepreneur, travel, lifestyle mentor, speaker, educator, and the founder of [Our Connected World](#), which helps free spirited souls around the world learn more about our beautiful planet and themselves. Robin has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social policy and innovation. She is fluent in four languages, and she's originally from Italy. But have now been traveling the world for 12 years and has been to over 40 countries.

Robin, welcome to the show.

Robin Who: Hey, Matt. Thank you so much for having me and for this amazing introduction.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you here. You and I needed to start off by setting the scene, though, and talking about where we are doing this interview. Unfortunately, we are not in person today. I am actually recording this in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, on the East Coast of the United States.

And where are you today?

Robin Who: I am in Alberta, Canada, and more specifically Calgary today.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Well, we have agreed to make this an Aperitivo hour as sort of a throwback and giving some love to your homeland where I've spent a lot of time in Italy. And some of my fondest memories are of those late afternoon sort of sunset hours, where everyone gathers.

You know, in Sicily near the waterfront and is watching the sunset and the boats and stuff and having drinks. And so, I thought we'd sort of virtually recreate that space. So, I have just poured a glass of wine and I thought we could start off maybe sharing a little bit about Italy and what we both love about your amazing country.

Can you talk about where you have lived? You've lived in many places in Italy, where in Italy you have lived and what some of the amazing things about Italy are that maybe travelers who haven't been there or haven't spent much time there should definitely think about going to see?

Robin Who: Absolutely. And also, with the Aperitivo you're speaking my language, I'm like really working, this is like an off project of working, importing Aperitivo everywhere I live and go.

It's such a little, very Italian, but like such a little cultural thing. Mediterranean, I would say because like Spanish have like tapas, right? They go for pinches and tapas and it's kind of that vibe. So really appreciate that this is an aperitivo interview. As for Italy, you're right. Yeah, I have lived across Italy.

So not just across the world, but also across Italy in several places. I would say most of my life I spent in the Northeast, Italy wise. So, I was born in Bolzano, which is an interesting part of Italy because it was actually Austria until 1919. So, it's one of those war mixes or war exchanges regions that happen after, you know, any war.

So, we gave away Istria to Croatia and we got South Tyrol from Austria. So, it's a very interesting and actually a special statute region of Italy because it's bilingual, it's German and Italian and Bolzano itself is 80 percent Italian, but as soon as it moved away from it, it's pretty much still German spoken more than Italian.

It's an interesting place, but I lived there only until I was three years old, even though my family's from there and my childhood city and the city that has my heart is Venice actually, which everytime I say that people are like, what? So, people even say, wait, what people live there? Yeah, I know. It's Venice, oh, what can I say? I think I definitely have a very different lens on Venice.

Then you were there for only like two, three days and every time that friends and so come to me. I'm really trying to like to portray like that experience that I've had of Venice and trying to like to bring them to all those places and show them all the history and why Venice is so awesome.

Because unfortunately, it's a very touristic place too. Canals, yes, do get smelly. Not like the big one, not Canal Grande, but like the smaller one. Yes, they get Spanish, all of those things. Sure. But there's something magical and one big thing that I would suggest. Anybody who wants to visit Venice is going out at night because I feel, you know, nowadays that it's a very busy now, tourism has picked up again after COVID going at night when most of the groups as well, they're gone, they're gone after dinner, it's then that you can really smell and almost feel how much the city has lived.

And if you're a bit of a fantasy freak like me, my imagination just goes wild because. I have all these memories from when I was a kid and reading all these books and reading about all these characters and the balls that they had with the Venetian mask. That's when I feel you can feel the vibe more and kind of really get that feeling of the city, which is actually a very slow life feeling.

So maybe I like slow travel for this reason.

Matt Bowles: Tell me a little bit about your take on some of the dynamics that are going on in Venice with regard to the over-touristification of Venice and the impact that some of that is having on the local residents and what your take is on what sort of needs to happen there as someone who is from there.

Robin Who: Yeah, so, I mean, from a local perspective, I think the main issue is that as a local, your life is kind of going on and you can imagine big cities; Paris, New York, London, right? It gets busy. You can tell people who are like, they're trying to go A to B because of work, because of whatever reason, because they're just living their daily life, but they have space.

I think the issue in Venice is unfortunate, because of course everybody wants to see it. It's such a unique place. Of course, it's also really good for the economy to have tourism, but the issue with Venice is this space, even the streets are extra small. Like you're in the middle of the Laguna, right? In the middle of nowhere, like the main island, there's fish, there's a kind of bridge connecting to what we call still land, Terraferma, which is like master and all that area.

And besides that, you're literally in the middle of the Adriatic Sea and everything else is like the smaller islands like Murano, Burano, beautiful islands to visit. So, you already know Europe in general, especially for North America, you go to Europe, like roads are smaller, narrower, and all of that. Then you go into an island.

It just gets somehow more crowded and tinier. So, the issue is that having a lot of groups at once during the day, it really can stop the traffic because everything is so small. So, I know that the government is a while ago now was talking about for group, like big buses and big group tourism to have sort of like almost a schedule for them, because the reason of that is also like, for them to enjoy it, right?

Like I feel sometimes really bad, as I mentioned before, like, of course, if a friend comes and they have me and you kind of have somebody local and you're also not 10 people, you're just like one or two people, but like as a group, you know, you're traveling all the way from Japan, all the way from North America.

You want to also really experience the place. So, this overcrowding is, I think, affecting the experience of the tourist and the experience of the locals. So, so far, besides this kind of scheduling, like big buses and big Group tourism, no other solution has really been found. Cause I mean, you can't really like block people and be like, no, you're not coming today to Venice and things like that, right?

It's a bit hard to control, but I think a control over the group dynamics and like letting, let's say only, I'm just saying numbers here. I'm not don't quote me, but like four or five buses from this time to this time, another four buses from that could possibly help almost like an amusement park or something like that, just to make sure that everybody can enjoy their experience. Cause there's a lot to do and a lot to. That Venice offers to people.

Matt Bowles: Well, another place that you have lived, which is one of my all-time favorite places in the world is Sicily. I went to Sicily for a month back in 2016. I went to Syracuse. I lived in the old city of Ortigia, and I know you live in Syracuse as well.

I have literally been talking about it since 2016. I've been telling everyone about it. My parents are actually going later this year. They're going to Syracuse. They're going to stay in Artesia. They're going to go around Sicily and they're going because I've just been literally talking about it nonstop since I went, it is so amazing.

Can you share a little bit about Sicily for people that have never been, your experience there and you know why people should check it out?

Robin Who: Oh my God, yes. And how funny, by the way, like the coincidences of life, right? When you travel a lot and then the world gets really small when you were like, yeah, I've been to Ortigia.

I'm like, Ortigia? It's not really the first-place people go to. You know, you have Palermo, you have like a lot of other places that people usually go first, so absolutely love that. And I love that you have a very good memory of it. Ortigia is fantastic. What I think is very interesting, I'm like the, my time when I moved, you have to consider I moved from Northeast of Italy from Venice.

And let's say that Venice was basically all I knew, right? Cause I was very little when I moved away from Bolzano. Once I went to Sicily, I was about 10 years old or something like that. So, it was like the last year of elementary school in Italy. So, in Italy, it works like a five years of elementary, three of middle school and then another five of high school.

So, it was like kind of like the new kid. And it was, it's funny because it's within the same country, but in a way, it was a bit of a cultural shock. People are so hospitable. I would say actually a lot of the stereotypespe around Italians being so warm and friendly and like having big families and like all of that.

I would say that is more the South and a bit of the center than the North, North. I would say the North actually is more Central European in some ways. I think the average person, of course there's different people. I mean, I'm from the northeast and I would say I'm pretty Italian in my way of being like the stereotype of Italy, uh, loud and ah, but uh, basically like just coming from a bit more reserved, right?

Like it's not necessarily colder in the north, but it's a bit more reserved. It's a bit more, you get, need to get to know the person and then they open up. And you go to a place like Sicily or other parts of the South, and it's literally just like you're part of the family. They just saw you; they treat you as part of the family.

You're like, welcomed. They call you like, Gioia, which means joy, but also in a way like kind of saying like darling and love. It's fantastic. And so that was shocking in a way, culturally, in a good way, of course. I was like, everybody was so welcoming me. And I think that played for me a very good role because getting as a 10-year-old, everybody knows each other for four years.

If that wasn't the case, that this is kind of like the cultural spirit there. It would have been way harder for me to adapt and to go through this geographical change in my life. So, in that sense, it was really good for me. But on the other end, one thing that I recall, and I had to navigate, at already 10 years old, trying to navigate cultural differences.

In the north, I would say where you can be a bit more like direct and sarcastic and things like that. Instead of feeling in the south of Italy, again, there's more like the weight of the words. There's something beautiful behind it as well, but I had the feeling that I had to learn to be a bit better at how I was communicating to not offend others.

And this comes also because to be honest, in the south of Italy, the Italian that they speak and I'm speaking about like when they speak Italian, I don't understand the dialect. It's actually very eloquent. The grammar they use is actually I would say for some things like even more proper, even more like how Italian should be than in other parts of Italy.

There's something about it, that influence, I think, of the Greeks, the Arabs that were there, that oratory, like the orators. I think something was left in that culture, right? Cause I mean, Italy unified in 1861. So, like, there's something that stayed. And so, I had to learn to really give weight to my words and formulate myself differently.

And then once you like learn the people, and then of course, in my circle of friends, maybe it was a bit different, but in general, as a general dynamic, I think these two things were what struck me the most as a 10-year-old?

Matt Bowles: Well, I love what you just mentioned in terms of the history and the historical diversity of cultural influences on Sicily, which was one of the things that was so immediately apparent to me and which I was so enamored with in Sicily. And if you look at the basic history of Sicily, just go on like a historical tour of any kind, Sicily was part of Greece for many years. You know, I saw the birthplace of Archimedes and it was like, one of the people on my tour was like, oh, Archimedes, the Greek dude that invented the lever.

They're like, yeah. They're like, oh, well, when did he move to Greece? Like, no dude. This was Greece for his whole life, you know, he's from here. And then, like Arabic was the primary language spoken in Sicily for a century. And there's this massive North African influence there. And all of these different cultures that have influenced Sicily.

I went on a food tour in Palermo, which was one of the best tours I've been on anywhere in the world. Because what they did through the food tour is they used it as a mechanism and an entree to do a history

culture and basically also look at the class history of Sicily, right? It's like, okay, now we're going to eat a spleen sandwich.

Well, why are there spleen sandwiches here? And then you look at the whole class history of Sicily in terms of people that couldn't afford to go into the restaurant and then people that need to eat food because they, their teeth were falling out and stuff. And so there were certain things that were made and all of this stuff, which has then survived in some way, shape or form, but has this incredible history relating to economic class, relating to cultures, relating to different groups that were there and they brought different things, and they made different dishes and like all this stuff.

And so now I can remember when I was in Palermo in 2016, I actually went there with my sister, and we looked up what is the best pizza shop in Palermo. And there was one that just stood out by orders of magnitude in terms of like the number of reviews, you know, that it had and stuff like that. And it was a Tunisian pizza shop. And we're like, we've got to go there. Right? So we go, it is as Tunisian as you can get, right? I mean, Tunisian flags, also Palestinian flags, Islamic preachers on the TV, inside the pizza shop.

And their number one dish that they made was called a kebab pizza. So, it was basically like kebabs as topping on the pizza and we're like, we got to order this. And it was like \$6 for a pizza that feeds two people, right? So, my sister and I like split that for dinner and it was just so amazing, but so incredible to understand sort of the cultural fusion in the history of all of the different cultures that make up Sicily and how distinct that particular region of Italy is and still is today.

Robin Who: Yeah, absolutely. And I think this is one of the things that I'm really also passionate about. Italy is like how diverse it is because of these histories. And another thing that by looking at the history, and I think it's awesome that you did a tour that doesn't only show your food, which is the obvious choice for Italy, but also the history part of things, because it is definitely more intricate and some of the differences between let's say North, Center and South, and even the economic situation nowadays that it's different between these three regions that we can give to Italy as regions, it is because of history.

So, something that did happen after the unification of Italy in 1861, they didn't consider of what stage and what economical stage all the different parts were because the North was already more industrialized. The North had been under Austrians and French and like all this population, whereas the South, for example, was very agriculture dependent.

And so there was a big gap in where the different areas of Italy were at. And there's also created from the get-go, like it wasn't really addressed. It was like, oh, we're unified, but we're not really looking at where everybody's coming from basically. And making sure that it's unified also in that way as a country.

And so, in a way, like some parts of Italy were kind of forgotten. At first it was all Turin-based before the capital moved to Rome. And so, they weren't really thinking about it. And so, I think, in my opinion, based on a lot of this history, we can also tell why we still have some of these economical differences nowadays in 2023 between the North, the South, in salaries, in jobs, in all of these things. I think where the cause root of all of this is what happened after we were unified as a country.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to talk a little bit about your travel journey when you started venturing outside of Italy, can you talk about how your interest in world travel started to develop? And then what some of your initial Experiences were like?

Robin Who: Yeah, so my very first experience were going chronologically in order here because after Sicily, her and I moved to Germany, but I was 12 and you have to consider that I did not speak English.

I did not speak German. I did not speak anything but Italian and my parents have always been trying to help and give us, you know, when I was very little in Venice, I remember going to an English tutoring, like after hours. So, cause they knew the importance of speaking English for the future, but you still don't get to the point of actually being able to survive and live in a country and live only between English and then German.

Well, forget about it at the time, right? So, for me, I had the opposite. So, at first I talked about going from a more reserved way of communicating with each other physically, like all of those, like also nonverbal cues that you have to all of this warmth and friendliness. And then move to Frankfurt, which is a pretty bank business city in Germany.

The weather was gray, people were not smiling in the, you know, the transportation. It was, this is what I remember. And of course, there's good things about Frankfurt too, but I remember just really struggling and having almost yet again, a cultural shock and another cultural adaptation I had to go through as a 12-year-old where, you know, you're already a teenager, you're, you can't communicate with people.

And I think that was, it went well, obviously. And I, if I look back at it, I also had very amazing people that even if they couldn't talk to me, because I didn't speak properly English yet, they were still like super nice to me because they were like, oh no, it's like the new girl and she doesn't speak any language and stuff like that.

And so, looking back, I definitely was lucky to have amazing people around me and so on, but the journey was intense. And I think until I spoke English well, I was still in my way in an Italian bubble, but without being in Italy and missing Italy because of that. But over 15 years later, I look back at it and I'm like, that is the moment in my life where all of my travel aspirations and like that exploration that I've always had since I feel like I was born, but it actually came to a reality because finally I was abroad, I've always dreamt of like exploring Italy. Now, all of a sudden, I was not even in Italy, I was in another country. I had to learn another language and I've always loved languages.

So, it was a lot of hard work, but then now if I think about it, this is probably the moment in my life that was also a trampoline because after that, to be honest, I could not go back to having a life that is not international, that is not with people from so many different cultures, friends from all over the world.

It was the moment that really changed me that way and made me as cosmopolitan and a world lover as I can be today.

Matt Bowles: Well, you now speak four languages fluently and you teach language learning. It's become a huge passion and centerpiece of your life and your profession and everything else. Can you share a little bit about that trajectory and how that developed into such a passion from that initial immersion in Germany where you only spoke Italian?

Robin Who: So, my journey with languages has been that, yes, even though, you know, I've loved it and I've always, I remember babbling to myself, literally sounds. It wasn't words. I was reading this like very, you know, almost for kid's books for, well, I was kind of a kid, but books for English.

I remember one specific; it was like a bookworm, and it was the story of this bookworm and it stuck with me. And so, I was repeating and without reading the words, I was just repeating, and I was like making

these sounds. And then wishing one day I would be fluent and then Germany happened. And then I became fluent.

I was in an international school, but a lot of the subjects were in English. So, for me, what, how that kind of marked me and also what I'm doing now is really the fact that it is so hard to not communicate, to not feel understood. Even sometimes now, especially when you're like under pressure, you're missing the word and it's like so frustrating, but imagine that, but imagine like you really cannot say anything.

And so, it kind of affected me in the way that I really empathize and I really connect with those people who just moved somewhere and really struggle with the language. Because the language really is the way to truly, fully connect in depth with somebody. When you can speak well, this language, which most of the time is somebody's native language.

So, whether it's yours or the other person's, right? Like you need to have that common language to be able to really, truly connect in depth. And so, in a way, missing that language aspect. You're missing that connection aspect. And as human beings, we're a kin species. We need that connection. We need that belonging.

And so, I guess ultimately what it is, it's about belonging and feeling accepted and feeling you are making those connections that make you human, that make you happy. And so that's why going through it and knowing that so many other people go through it, there's a lot of people still immigrating into countries and struggling and having those language barriers.

And so, because I've felt it by living in different countries, I think it changed me in the way that, A, first of all, if somebody doesn't speak the language, I'm there. And if I know the language, especially I'm like, they're translating, trying to involve them as much as possible and so on, but also really taking up on me to kind of create somewhere where people can learn the language so that they can have those connections.

Matt Bowles: I love that, and I love the empathy part of it. I think it's very relevant both for Sicily, for example, with all types of folks that are coming there through forced migration and refugee situations who are not fluent, certainly in Italian or Sicilian when they get there, and also people coming into the United States and other places that out of these challenging situations and are coming here and aren't fluent with the language and stuff. So, I appreciate that perspective.

I want to ask you also about some more of your travel experiences and some of the places around the world where you've spent time and some of your reflections on those experiences. I think I want to start with my homeland, four generations removed. Now I was born in the United States, of course, but originally heritage is from Ireland, and I was able to go back to Ireland.

I lived there a year, studied abroad. Went to Trinity College in Dublin. And as you know, I've been back a number of times since, and I've done a lot of political activist solidarity work in the north of Ireland and things like that. But I know you have spent a lot of time in Ireland as well. Can you share a little bit about what that experience was like for you?

Robin Who: So Ireland for me really marks the country I moved to not really by choice as in I wasn't ready to leave Canada at the time I didn't want to leave Canada but bureaucracy made me leave as in my visa expired and I couldn't find a sponsorship in time. And so I was like, well, I'll have to go back to a road just to save some more money for my next move.

But if I'm going back, let's go somewhere I've never been. And Ireland has always been an interesting country for me. I knew a lot of people also from the university who did exchanges actually with Trinity College. Absolutely loved it. Met Irish as well here and there. So, I kind of was interested. It was like, okay, I've lived in England, but I haven't lived in Ireland yet.

And the history, as you said, right? Like I feel like, I didn't know a lot and I think in a way I do like to go to places where I want to learn more about their history and why they are where they are now. Well, first of all, I actually had a step over in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, which was like the baptism to my journey to Ireland because I went there and it's a great fun place.

First of all, I met very interesting people, a woman from Vancouver who does the like documentaries with indigenous women and kind of befriended her very randomly as you do when you travel. And then we went out and there were signs in Gaelic, there was Irish music playing. I was like, I'm already in Ireland.

I mean, I'm not that far either, right, by then. So, I had this like little baptism, which brought me back a bit of that excitement of like, oh, I'm going somewhere new. And then I landed, that's when the excitement kicked in. And then everybody was just very nice. It's so cosmopolitan. There's a lot of also students, people who have Latin American, especially they have a lot of the countries in Latin America, like Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, they have good agreements with Ireland to be students, especially I would say majority Mexican, Brazilian, and Bolivian as nationalities from Latin America that moved there under students.

And then you go around and hear Spanish, and you hear Italian. Yeah. It's such a contrast city and I absolutely loved it. And from a career perspective, what happened was I did start with a more random job, let's call it. And then after that, I started my career in business development, which then led me to my career in marketing.

So, it's kind of funny. You look back again and the mindset shift that I had to do to not be sad about what happened with the Canada story was. That I will find my way, right? And to make the best out of it, which is something that I always also tell others, whether my clients or people I know or friends that going through a transition moment that I tell you make the best of it, it will turn out fine.

There's no other way it can turn out. You will find your path again. There's no other way if you make the best out of it. And so, I did, and I really very focused on trying to get into marketing. And that's what I did. And I had amazing experiences, uh, from a career perspective, but also really amazing friendships that were built and traveled a lot and learned so much about Ireland, did a lot of road trips, and now I look back at it and I'm, thank God I went to Ireland. You know what I mean? Thank God I had this little break from North America, went back to Europe and experienced a different country. And now look at it, it worked out.

I am now back in Canada as now finally like a permanent immigrant, not temporary resident. And I did write a short story about it where it's kind of more the airport moment and like all the thoughts that were going through in the airport, because you don't realize the elite status that you have when you're always able to decide your next move we're so mobile in a way.

And then the moment that you're forced to move, even though you love traveling, you love new places, but you're forced and that wasn't your plan. It doesn't go down well at first, right? Whatever you don't plan, I guess, whatever you don't fully choose on never goes down. And when it's out of your control, it's even harder pill to swallow, right? So, I think that's what Ireland is. for me as a life chapter.

Matt Bowles: Well, you've now been to over 40 countries. And I think the next one that I want to just pluck out of your travel resume to ask you about is your experience in India. Can you talk about where you were in India and what that experience was like for you?

Robin Who: India was two things. The first one, I felt culturally there was a similarity with the Mediterranean, just the hospitality part of things. So hospitable, people ready to help, people who loved to share about their culture, which of course I'm all about. Did a, we stayed mostly just at hostels. And so, a very great memory I have is one of the hostel kind of managers, people who were taking care of reception and stuff.

He invited all of us who were at the hostel to this kind of birthday celebration. We were in Jaipur, which is in Rajasthan, which is Northwest of India. And we went and it was a Babel, right? Like it was one of those, is this tower in this clean stone.

And we go, and then it was this room, and it was just open room. You sit down, you eat with your hand on the big plates. Right. And we were actually wearing different kinds of cloth that they gave us. And we didn't speak any language going back to the language factor. The hostel guy knew that, but all of us from the hostel didn't know anything at all.

And so, he was translating a bit, but there was something which I love when you travel and this happens, where it's like, you didn't need words. There was just kindness. They just totally accepted us. They were the nona filling up the plate, like just giving you more food, making sure you like it and just nonverbal language going on one on one.

And it was beautiful. And all we were trying to do is like, okay, let's, you know, make sure that we're being respectful. So, we ate with one hand, we were sitting on the ground and then we were playing music. And it was just, you're in this bubble. I say we, as in my cousin and I, I remember talking about it again.

And we were just so grateful. They just literally accepted 10, 15 strangers they don't understand to their house and share the celebration. And this is something that really stayed with me. And I would say, go to India like any day, right. And visit it because the majority of the experience that I have from India is such a strong culture, like so interesting, like such a strong cultural experience and such kind people.

Matt Bowles: I relate to that so much. I have been to India a couple of times. I've been to a lot of the places that you've been to have been to Delhi and Mumbai. And I've been, I was in Punjab for Diwali in 2017. And at the time I was there with my relationship partner and she's Indian heritage, but she's not from Punjab, right?

So, we were there in Amritsar and our Airbnb host says, well, do you have friends and family here that you'll be spending Diwali with? And we were like, well, no, we're just visiting. We don't actually know anyone here. And he said, oh, well then, you'll spend it with my family. What? He's like, yeah, I'll be back to pick you up at this time.

Like what? So literally he comes, picks us up, takes us to his house and it's his entire extended family and us.

Robin Who: Oh my God.

Matt Bowles: And they do the whole Diwali thing all from the spiritual, you know, rituals to the massive feast of all the food to the going to the roof and lighting off the fireworks. And it was just us and his entire extended family at his personal home for the entire evening for this amazingly special and wonderful cultural celebration.

And it just melted my heart entirely. I was like, Oh my gosh, the hospitality is so next level and the, just the love and the acceptance and the welcoming into the, it was just amazing. I mean, it blew my mind. Every time I go to India, it just happens.

Robin Who: I 100% agree. And that's something that I like to share more because I think a lot of people go for yoga and spirituality, uh, kind of retreats, but there's so much more.

And that kindness that you said it is heart melting, not even just heartwarming, but heart melting. And in a way, for me also coming from the Mediterranean, which is a very, also kind of food and hospitality and, Oh, you're part of the family now. And culture with travel, you really see that how similar there it is, right?

Like, I mean, there's all the culture and the history. It was so interesting to learn all about that because to be honest, nothing I've ever covered in history covered it as much as being there with the people, people bringing us to museums and places and explaining all the history and, and so many religions, so many, so much like India is like a continent basically, right?

So, it was so interesting. And that's why I say just find a way to go because the whole experience opens you to this kindness, and I think this is why spirituality, you feel it without even being spiritual. If you're not spiritual, you just feel it. It's everywhere. And also, the other side is also you will notice that all these societal things that especially here in the Western, we may have about some places in Asia, including India, then you go there, and you realize, wait a second, it's actually very similar. Like, what are we talking about? Why do we have this prejudice so strong versus some countries in Asia?

Matt Bowles: I want to also ask your tips and your personal approach to going to countries where you don't speak the language.

You're obviously fluent in four languages. And of course, Spanish is a passport to a lot of countries. English is a passport to a lot of countries, right? But when you go to a country where you really don't speak that language before you go, and you're planning that trip, I want to ask for how you choose to create a culturally immersive experience in general.

And how language relates to that and what tips you might give people for planning trips to countries where they don't speak the language so that they can have a deeper connection with the place and the people there.

Robin Who: Whenever I don't speak the language, the first thing I do is learn those five, six words that just get you by, that gets you by starting and concluding a conversation.

So, hello, hi, can I, or do you speak English, or do you speak whatever language it is that you want to speak? And then thank you, just those small words. And that's the first thing that I try to learn, whether I go and I ask people, like if I'm backpacking and so I don't really have much time to plan, I'm just kind of going.

I just ask people as soon as they're at locals, like, how do you say this? And how do you say that? And I really tried to learn and to speak. Use it because you may think one could think, Oh my God, it's just one

word. It makes no difference. No, it makes a total difference. Just you trying to speak that out of person language, you put a smile on their face.

And this actually happened very recently in Europe, in Bulgaria, to be more specific, there were a lot of tourists, and it was a lot of English going on. And this woman was kind of, okay, whatever. And she expected me to just go straightforward in English. And so, I said, hello in Bulgarian. And then I said, thank you.

And like, she literally, like she wasn't smiling at all at first. And then I said, she just put a little smile and then her whole attitude towards me changed. So never underestimate the power of even knowing a few words that you can utilize in your daily life, every time that you need to speak to somebody basically and show politeness as well.

The other thing that is also connected to that is if you are going to a place with a different alphabet to have a look at that or have like a cheat sheet for it. Nowadays there's of course, Google translate, so you can download apps for taking a picture and translating menus and so on, but I think from an also safety perspective, just kind of being able to read a sign or saying some words in that language, for example, help or Emergency or something that gives enough in the communication.

It's one word, but it gives enough for you to maybe prevent a dangerous situation or maybe prevent to like to end up somewhere you didn't want to navigation and stuff like that. I think that's very important. And whether it's digitally that you do that or paper, if you're more paper person, but have a little bit of that kind of guide that brings you throughout the language experience and that super basic language that you should know, or at least understand to travel safely to.

And this is connected to the cultural thing. So, especially if you have the time and if it's, somewhere you're going, uh, for a longer time. But this is in general, if you want to have an immersive experience, research the place, read news around the place, try to do local experience, especially at the very beginning, as soon as you're there, stay with somebody who's local.

So, we're talking about, I mean, yes, urban beaches, couch surfing. If you find somebody that is trustworthy and stuff and stuff like that over there, just mingle, mingle with the locals as much as possible and try to go as locally as possible and try to ask local suggestions. There's a lot of sites that you can use even before going and the other thing to be honest, and this is maybe works for some people more than others, but one thing that I still will share as a tip, don't plan everything to the very dot.

And why is that being kind of like similar to what I said, I like ask people, locals where to go and so on, similar to that kind of experience. If you plan everything, you may be missing out on something that you couldn't find in your research and as something spontaneous, that could be a fantastic opportunity, a fantastic experience.

So, giving your trip, especially if it's smaller, where you tend to plan more because it's a shorter time, giving yourself that flexibility to be spontaneous and say, yes to a spontaneous experience that may show up because you connected with somebody while you're there. It's so important. And that will give you that extra immersion.

And I think I've always traveled this way. I've always, to be honest, in general, found more helpful people who want to help you and want you to love their country than the opposite, right? Staying realistic. Yes. Of

course, you always be careful, all the safety hacks that, you know, use them, but don't let that fear of like the unknown prevent you from being spontaneous and go local and mingle and just say, let's go.

Yes. Feel your gut feeling. If your gut feeling is okay, you're probably going to be fine.

Matt Bowles: A hundred percent. Yeah, I agree with that so much. And I think that really identifying what some of those local experiences are, depending on where you are and what type of experiences you're interested in getting there and then ask local people about it, is the best way to navigate and find that out.

And I learned that because I have been probably to geez, I don't know, 80 countries or so. I was in Nigeria in 2019 in Lagos, and I went there primarily for the nightlife and the music and just the local cultural experience, which I am so enamored with, and I wanted to just see it in person and be part of that.

And the reality is in Nigeria, a lot of the white folks that are there, are there as expats that are working for oil companies or some capacity like that. And what I realized is when I was asking people there locally, where do you think that I should go to like a nightclub, you know, to go out? And they're looking at me and they're like, you would probably like going to this place, right?

And then I would go, and it would just be absolutely not what I'm looking for, right? It's some bougie place with bottle service and no one's dancing. And it's just that all the expats are kind of sitting around there. So, I'm like, okay, this is literally the opposite of the reason that I came to Nigeria. And so, what I realized on that trip is I'm asking the wrong question.

And so, what I started doing, I was with a Kenyan, a nomad friend of mine. And so, she and I were traveling there together. And so, what we started doing is asking our Uber drivers a different question. And we said, where do you go out when you go to the club?

Robin Who: Yes.

Matt Bowles: And they were like, well, I certainly don't go around here. You know, and so we were like, well, we would like you to drive us to where you go when you go out to the club and just drop us there. And he was like, okay. And then we found exactly what we were looking for simply by changing the question that we were asking. Right. But the types of places that we went to in Lagos.

There's no way you're going to find those places. Researching online before you go, looking at reviews, finding what comes up on TripAdvisor. None of that stuff is there. These are not places that are reviewed by tourists. These are if you want to go and experience local culture and go to the places where local people go, you need to ask local people on the ground, after you get there, where they go and then be open to wherever that leads.

Robin Who: Absolutely. And I love that you said being open because that's the other thing, right? I think that is the basis of all the immersive experiences. Just being open to it. You won't like it. Well, you may not like one activity.

You may love the other one but just do it. Then you have done it once, then you know you don't like it. But if you go in and you're not open to it, you may never know if you like it or not. In the first place, but yeah, it's so true. And I think local guide or just going local. And there's also, I think, size to do that kind of having, finding a local guide.

If you're more of a planner than maybe that, but otherwise, if you're just as spontaneous as this, just literally what you said, go ask. And I love that you said where you go. And I think it's very true because sometimes they think, oh, like you don't want to show this part because, like some type of tourist may prefer to only go there.

Otherwise, it's too, I don't know, shocking, whatever it is that they think. But the reality is no, we want all of that. We want it to experience all of that you're experiencing as a local. So, I love that.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to talk to you a little bit, Robin, about the psychology of travel and the psychological impact that travel has on us. Your academic background, of course, is in psychology. Can you share, just starting off, assuming that people have no psychology background in the academic sense, can you explain what neuroplasticity is and how travel and immersion in foreign cultures impacts our brain?

Robin Who: Yes, the brain is formed by neurons. The neurons have connections between them, like pathways that connect them. Those connections are super important because when you have, let's say, like a nervous input that let's call it current, that goes, it goes through a certain pathway, which means it goes from a neuron to another neuron through this little like synopsis and so on.

And neuroplasticity, what it says is that it's not true that our brain is rigid. We indeed can change those pathways. What it means is that these neurons can suddenly connect to another neuron, where like they connect to more neurons, or simply, they're like, they change who they're connected to. And that creates, once the input comes from the outside, it creates a different cognitive positive in the brain and hence a different reaction to it or different set of thoughts and so on, right?

So good news, right for us. And it's fascinating because this is at the base of a lot of what I would say is the travel benefits to people. But in general, neuroplasticity basically gives us in a way, hope to put it in very simple terms, because it means that it doesn't matter if you're a kid or not.

You can still learn and even change the way you think, or even change those cognitive behaviors. It changes because you just learned something new, you changed your environment, you practice something new. And also, on the negative side, you were caused by psychological stress. So, this is why neuroplasticity is like this awesome thing, but also can be depending on that experience that you've had.

If it's a negative one, it can like also to affect you negatively, but this it's a, the beauty of it. And what I see is the fact that our brain is neuro, we have neuroplasticity that our brain is changeable. The circuits are changeable. It actually opens up to the fact that we are always learners and that learning and that new experiences will literally change how we are and how we behave.

I think it's very beautiful.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit more specifically about how the act of traveling and immersing ourselves in different cultures and experiencing different things. How does that directly relate to boosting creativity and changing the way that we perceive reality and the world?

Robin Who: Yeah. So, it actually has to do with neuroplasticity. So, one of the big things or one of the main ways we can change these pathways in our brain is by being in a new environment. Being exposed to new perspectives, being exposed to something that wasn't part of our reality before. So basically, you grow up in an environment and you're creating all these pathways, right, in your brain based on that.

The moment you go somewhere new, or you're exposed to a new experience, even more strongly when you're literally moving country or going full on culturally different countries. So, let's say even going west to east, right? Like the eastern world, the western world, culturally very different and so on. Doing that puts you in this place where those pathways are almost challenged and you are exposed to new ways of thinking, new ways of living.

And so automatically, almost by default, your brain needs to adapt to that and integrate that. And so suddenly your reality is not that, let's call it like the box reality you were in before, but suddenly you realize that there's this door into a blank canvas. You realize that there are so many realities within the reality of life that we're in right now.

And by being in those new environments, you are so exposed to it that you can internally absorb it, and then your brain changes, and you're learning new things. And every time you learn something new, something changes in your pathways. And so, the way you think changes, as we said before, those pathways really have a correlation with our cognitive behavior.

And when you travel, first of all, you are challenged in a lot of ways, especially regarding the ways you grab, the ways that life should be working X, Y, Z because this is what the idea was where you were growing up. So, you're challenged a lot and you're challenged to the point that by default, those pathways change.

And what will happen is that you will be able to think more out of the box. And traveling is really like a tool. I always call it, it's a life school. And this is something that my dad actually said to a lot when I was like a kid. And he still says it nowadays, but like he would always say, in Italian, you actually say 'gym of life', palestra di vita.

And so, he would always say that travel is the gym of life. That's where you, you get your skills. It teaches you more than like, certain formal education can teach you because of that. And because you're learning new skills, you're learning new ways of thinking, you are more creative. Your perspective on certain situations can change.

So, let's say usually maybe you would find a certain situation stressful. Suddenly you're equipped to deal with that because you're looking at that situation differently. And another beautiful thing that happens is the empathy aspect of it, which is another skill. It's a soft skill to have, right? Being able to understand somebody else from an emotional, like emotional intelligence we're talking about.

And the way that works is we are a species that works by mimicking, right? That's how we learn as kids. We mimic, we have mirror neurons that tell us, oh, you do that. That's what happens. And that's how you learn like animals, right? Animals have the same. And so, when you're abroad and you're in a new environment, part of the skills that you have to develop.

And this goes back to some of the stories I shared earlier also goes emotionally, understanding emotional, the person you're talking to, it's almost a must for your survival in that environment. And so immediately you need to all those ways of thinking that part of the cognition that we have comes into play.

And then you're like, okay, but what is this person thinking? They're nodding, but actually nodding is no, like in India, for example, right? That is what we say. Yes, that's a no, uh, things like that you have to like to adapt to. And so all of this changes you, let's say you go abroad and then you go back. To say hi to your family, your brain has literally formed new pathways.

Your brain has literally not the same as when you left, and now you will not be able to look at the same situations with the same eyes as before, and you get out of the box and you're able to expand beyond what before was kind of that box of experience and that box of reality you were in a way you grew up in.

Matt Bowles: Can you also talk about the impact that learning a new language has on the brain.

Robin Who: Learning a second language, just going to go with second. And of course, the more, the kind of the bigger, the impact, but learning a second language, it basically physically adds gray and white matter to your brain, which means that from a brain health perspective, it's lasting longer, like the connections, like the dendrite's connections, they stay there longer.

The general connectivity of the brain is stronger. So, there's studies, I think from the 2016, 17, some pretty relatively recent studies that really show how learning a language literally creates new matter in your brain, which I find almost crazy. I would have never thought that it would have that much of an impact.

So that's from a physical perspective. The other part is one of our main areas of the brain is the prefrontal cortex, where a lot of the, let's say human abilities lay or some of where some of the abilities that differentiate us from apes, which is our closest pieces lay and when you learn a second language, that part, the prefrontal cortex, that part of the brain is stimulated more because of the kind of also the challenge of having to think basically when you speak multiple languages, what you're doing is trying to think, for example, to say the word in the right language.

So, every time you speak, you're making a cognitive effort while you do that. And that is doing like a crossword or a puzzle, right? You're just constantly training your brain. And so, the abilities and the skills that come with that, thinking faster problem solution, for example, that's one of the kind of perks that comes with that because you're able to keep on switching and thinking different language, you also have a bit the cultural aspect of the language.

So, the way the language is, why it is in a certain way, you have a deeper understanding of communication in general. And so, a lot of those communications. skills are better just because you know two languages. So, there is a lot of other benefits that people have looked at. The other thing that I think is worth mentioning is that going back to like, for example, kids who learn more than one language, people thought that it would actually be not beneficial for them.

But the reality is that when they learn multiple languages as kids, they may start speaking later than other kids that's only speaking language, but from a cognitive perspective, because of what all I just said from new white matter created and all of that, like strong connections between more connections, I would say between neurons and so on ability of thinking ability of problem solving and all of those things, it actually is very beneficial for the kids. So, it's not confusing to teach a second language to the kid from when it's like little.

Matt Bowles: Well, I know that you have taken a lot of these concepts that we have discussed already, from slow travel and cultural immersion and language learning to these concepts of opening up pathways to empathy and connecting with other people and you've put them all together in founding [Our Connected World](#).

Can you talk about the founding of it, [Our Connected World](#), why you started it and what it is and what it offers to people today?

Robin Who: Yeah. So as the kind of the brand name says itself, it's all about connections, right? Connections through travel and language learning. So nowadays there's two things. So, I'm very big on education.

I think education is a power. It's kind of a story, teaching somebody how to fish versus giving them a fish. So, I actually started off with building courses. So, [Our Connected World Academy](#) was my very first step into the world with [Our Connected World](#) as it is nowadays. So, I teach Spanish and Italian. And then also travel planning.

So how to travel safely, but also without breaking the bank and immerse yourself in the places that you're going to. And more specifically, I have courses around like Latin America and Italy and Spain, of course, because it's connected to the language. So, whether you want to go travel there or live there, that's kind of what these educational courses do for you.

And then on the other side, it's all about the travel lifestyle. I think truly like for me; travel is not just a passion. It has been my life. It is my life still nowadays. I can't imagine a life without travel. For me, because it's just how it is for me. So, it's really more than just a passion. And so, I think like it's stemmed from the fact that I really enjoy like business development and entrepreneurship and marketing.

That's kind of my other background in the business world. And I wanted to match that with travel. And so, I found those. A lot of people, especially millennials and so on, want to move away from that nine-to-five in the corporate world only and really start working remotely. So, I help others like bringing their career physically online.

And because of that, creating the flexibility to travel as much as they want to travel, you know, long term to move abroad while being financially stable. So, these are kind of the two areas of Our Connected Worlds. And at the bottom of all of that is always being able to really immerse yourself and really create strong connections across this planet.

Matt Bowles: Well, another thing that I have heard you talk about a good bit is the concept of travel as a pathway to self-discovery. Can you share a little bit about that and maybe also share some client transformation stories in terms of folks that you've mentored on their journeys?

Robin Who: Yeah, self-discovery for travel is the key to it. It's something that almost like we do without knowing that we're doing it. Unless you're really just going to maybe a resort for two weeks or a week and you're not doing anything else besides sitting on a chair. Other than that, I think self-discovery is almost a default of travel. Like as soon as you go and you're like, as we said before, open to these new experiences and open to the exploration of new places with that comes a lot of reflection time.

And especially if you're solo traveling. You are in this unknown world at first, and you don't always know what to do. So, you need to learn a, to really feel good with yourself and feel like great company and be great company to yourself. And that's A, and B dealing with problems, challenges, not so good situations.

And that. is what bringing growth in you because you realize how resourceful you are. You have to be resourceful and hence because you're put in those situations, you're creating those extra skills and then talking to people who are from different backgrounds. I think that's a huge play in the self-discovery.

It opens up those realities we were talking about before. You realize that there is other things you could do, there are other ways you could live, there's so many options, if anything. And so, it puts you in a position

that you want to rethink, I think, sometimes. It's a position like this blank canvas that is in front of you, and you can start to think about you.

It's you that you're thinking about. It's not you in connection with your family, your friends back home. It's just you and what you want. And so, it's a great moment to really develop that roadmap and that path for yourself, knowing that there's always different opportunities and different experiences that you can do.

And there's not only one way to live and there's not only one correct way to live your life. And so, because of all of these things, you will be different. You will grow from it. You will discover new versions of you. You will discover things that maybe you like, you don't like, right? What we talked about before.

You're just exposed constantly to so many new things that slowly it helps you figure out who you are as a person right now and possibly where you want to go.

Matt Bowles: Can you share a little bit about your personal reflections on your journey after 12 plus years of travel. What impact has all of that travel had on you, Robin, as a person?

Robin Who: Just having the ability to create relationships. No matter the nationality of the other person, no matter like the history, I think when I say I'm open minded, I generally, if I feel for whatever reason that I'm not being open minded, I have an alarm and I'm like, why aren't you being open minded? You know what I mean?

So, I think that way of thinking and seeing the world just changed. I don't think I could ever go back to, or even just growing up in Italy and having a basically Italian culture, my first reality was that. So by living abroad, having people from around the places and seeing also my own country and my own culture from the outside, that has really changed the way I see myself.

I understand why I have certain behaviors, or I had certain behaviors, and I don't think I can go back to it. And the other thing besides relationships and connections and languages, of course, part of it. I think the other thing is. curiosity. I've always been very curious. It's not something completely new, but it's just how beautiful this planet is.

How many more places, how many more people and cultures and populations and so much there is to learn from exploring this world? And I don't think I can chill and be like, ah, you know what? I'm done with drugs. I just can't. I think sometimes I talk to friends who are also more settled than me and we have chats about it and I'm like, yeah, where do you want to, where do you see yourself, those questions, like, where do you see yourself in five years, 10 years?

I don't have a 10-year plan. I don't have a five year plan either, to be honest. And I think that also takes away a lot of pressure. Cause I'm like, why do I need to have my next five years figured out? Five years is a long time. There's so much that can happen. And I think this is a perspective that you really get by moving a lot, but also traveling because you realize the world is big, stuff happens, I may change my mind, I don't know, so many versions of myself, it's just a work in progress.

And that organic flow kind of thing and spontaneous aspect, uh, that travel teaches you. That's another thing that I don't think I can ever change or go back to the previous version.

Matt Bowles: Well, with regard to the pathways to empathy, I feel like one of the things that you and I have connected on very deeply is our attentiveness to the way that power structures operate in different parts of

the world, and will travel around the world, and we will pay very close attention to those things, and which groups are being marginalized in this situation, and which are the vulnerable groups that are being targeted and oppressed in this situation and how can we, be empathetic and align with those groups and support those groups.

And I'm wondering if you could share a little bit about that from your travel experiences, maybe talking about, for example, when you came to North America and you started spending time in Canada and learning about the struggle of the first nations in Canada and so forth, and how some of that consciousness has been raised for you.

Robin Who: So, for sure. And I think, like I've mentioned this to you before, that social and environmental aspect of my background. It's something that it's not right now indirectly, maybe part of my, what I do and my life, but I will never lose it. I think it's still something that fascinates me. So as mentioned before, like every time that I go to a new place, I'm also interested in history.

Like, why is it, why is now the way it is now? Basically, that's kind of the question that then, you know, looking back at history can help you. So, coming to North America before Canada, I only lived in briefly like six months or so, six, seven months in the US, but I didn't really get to the first nation. So, the indigenous aspect of the North American history until I was literally in Canada.

Here, first of all, what we learn in the books we do mention, because at least in Italy, I don't know, I've only studied it in Italy. This part of the history, we do learn about other colonization of all that period of life. So, it also with Indonesia and colonies in Africa, North America, Asia. So, we do learn about that part of history and outside of Europe, obviously.

But the depth of knowledge regarding the indigenous communities, what happened, and what is the reality now is very different. And I think part of me, when I first came, had this hope and wish to go and literally sit and be like, okay, where is the land? Cause I knew that lands were assigned after genocide and all of that. Lands were assigned to different tribes in different parts of this massive place, which is Canada.

And so, one of the things I was like, I wanted to go, I want to talk to them and connect. And then very soon I realized that is very far from the reality. And then when I volunteered in Costa Rica with indigenous over there, it actually showed me a similar thing, right? So everywhere in this part of the world where colonization happened.

Those indigenous tribes, they are not movies portrayed. The complication of the situation is way further than any book can tell you when you study it at school. And my main, in a way, sadness around it was not only that, oh, okay, so actually this place where they still live the way they want to live and have their culture and how that doesn't exist anymore.

And that was one of the main upsetting points where I'm like, wait, what? I thought that at least, not it was a happy ending, I was like, at least there was something good, something that they could like to hold on to, right? There was something left. And then you realize that actually, unfortunately, those areas are just those reservations, because there are reservations 'till nowadays, which is a bit crazy to think about 2023 talking about reservations feels a bit weird, but basically that's what they are.

They have this like dedicated land and there are so many problems. And I've heard of, I haven't been to Australia yet, but I've heard it's kind of similar with the aboriginals there.

Alcohol, women abused, lots of sex abuse. There is a reality that is way, way far than those movies portray of the culture of the Indians, the first nations, however you want to call them, of the regional tribes and original population of this land, and they are losing a lot of it. Now through social media, I think there's like two famous, at least here in Canada, Inuit women who are trying to educate people about their culture and their tattoo significance and what they eat and things like that and what it means to them and certain ways that they do songs.

But that it's a slowly dying culture and you can see, and you can see all the problems that came from the trauma that was given to this population and how it still lives. You can see Canada day become a more sensitive topic after finding all the kids were killed. And so now saying happy Canada day feels has a different tone to it.

So, I came like with all this thing. Oh my God. I so want to know also, cause I'm a big fan of nature and I'm like, teach me everything let's go. And then you're like, boom, bubble popped. And you realize the complexity and gravity of the situation and the trauma that is still here in 2023.

Matt Bowles: I feel like noticing the complexities and the contradictions of so many places around the world is a very important part of travel as well. And I'm curious how you process some of that. I mean, we've spent a lot of this podcast talking about our shared love for so many places, right? India and just the heart-melting hospitality and Sicily and just how warm and wonderful and amazing it is.

And at the same exact time, there is a right-wing neo-fascist regime democratically elected in power in India. There is a right-wing neo-fascist regime democratically elected in power in Italy. There is vigilante violence in both places that is targeting and murdering people on the street in some cases, right?

And all of these things are happening at the same time in the same place and are both true simultaneously. Can you share a little bit about how you sort of reflect on that and process that as a traveler moving through this world and having an empathetic land.

Robin Who: I love that you're asking it. You know why? Because this brings realism to the traveling world, which I think sometimes is missed in some of this, especially influencer, you know, I'm living on the beach and I'm working from the beach. But you're right, especially when you are the type of traveler, for example, we are, where you're like, we really do care about understanding and respecting the culture and learning. And we really see this almost as this one world, this human species on it. Obviously, we should all just hang out, right? Like just be friends and all of that. And we just should learn from each other, if anything, and just at least respect each other.

And as you say, what we see and how we may perceive the world because of these experiences, because of also open-mindedness and everything that comes with travel, there is a big part of this world that also doesn't see this and still lives in that box that we talked about before where it is one reality is the one truth.

And I think for some people, this can be actually very dangerous in the sense that that reality becomes everything. And this is how it all starts. I mean, if you take, let's say Italy, because that's my country, fascism, right? You're not Italian. Bad. Unless you are, I guess, Hitler for Mussolini, but anyway, you're not Italian, right?

You're not Italian. Bad. Anything out of it is bad. Doesn't matter. Even some of within the Italians, are bad. And so, you create this strong reality that is the one source of truth, the one, everything for you. And you

just revolve everything around it and these people can't get out of it. But I think there is also a bit of that borderline where it becomes overwhelming because you know, and you feel how wrong it is. And as an empath as well, you really feel the suffering that comes from it, the aftermath of all of this. But yet I think it becomes overwhelming because at the same time, you can't solve all of it as one person. Maybe as one person, you can do is speak your mind.

Talk about your experiences, share your truth, like that's what you can do. And slowly other people can come together, try to do something like that. But I think navigating this complexity is harder and not talked enough about, I would say. So, I really appreciate this question. And the last thing that I will add is that cycle of history. So, after the second world war, I'm talking about Italy because you mentioned it. After the second world war, we'd let's say lived in a more progressive liberal, like let's say we didn't have a dictatorship, right? And now boom, we're in that cycle where suddenly because of immigrations and refugees and this and that, that same feeling stems out again.

And unfortunately, in other European countries you would never believe this would be ever a thing, like a full-on extreme right. wing party. That is quite intense. We all went through the Second World War and now this is happening again. It's a circle of history and in a way, unfortunately, I think it's connected to forgetting history.

Forgetting how our grandparents, our ancestors, whatever you want to call them, fought for our freedom and how much we also as Italians are an emigrant country, we are everywhere. Like the Irish, right? We forget our own roots and our own history and the consequences of certain ideologies that are so extreme.

They're so extreme that lead to catastrophic historical events. And somehow, it's like, as if we go like Microsoft reset, but it's hard. It's very hard and saddening. That's the saddening side of traveling and seeing this happen nowadays.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I think it's really important to continually delve into that stuff and think through that stuff and be aware of how we are all being socialized in certain ways, right?

To project things onto other groups, right? And it's just, it happens constantly. And it's so ironic, the hypocrisy of some of the stuff that you just alluded to is so poignant. In my view, when I see, for example, Irish folks, right, like my people who immigrated here in the United States and they were pushed out of Ireland through violent colonialism, ethnic cleansing, famine, all this kind of stuff coming over here, and then a few generations later, all of a sudden there's a lot of allure to start "becoming white" and assimilating into the dominant political establishment and the police force and then just start developing views about other groups that had different experiences getting here and how you know and so on and so forth right and so all of a sudden you're just like wait a minute, what are you even talking about?

Right? And so, you get all of these ironic contradictions where there's certain segments of the Irish American community who will be completely supportive of the Irish struggle in the north of Ireland and the decolonial struggle against the British and be outraged by the human rights abuses that are being committed by, you know, the police forces and the military occupation and all this kind of stuff against the Irish people.

And it's just completely outrageous. And then also in the same breath, be supporting the New York police department and all the abuses that they're carrying out against black folks in New York. And like, I mean, just this bizarre level of hypocrisy, but a lot of that has to do with just how we're socialized to view certain

groups as this group is dangerous, or this group is taking my resources and they're not authorized to do that.

And we're just socializing to sort of think about these things in these ways. And I think it's so important what you're saying about trying, to travel and open that empathetic pathway and understanding that a massive part of the world for them, travel is an experience of forced immigration. It's an experience of fleeing, you know, in a refugee capacity, some type of situation, which ironically often is induced by the very place where they're fleeing, right?

So, the United States government will have a foreign policy that destroys a country in South or Central America, and then those people eventually try to come to the United States, and then there's animus towards people that are fleeing a country that the United States was involved in destroying.

I mean, it's just, it blows the mind. But I think spending the time to look into that and read that history and understand what has happened, why the situation has occurred, where these people are coming from, and just have basic empathy, like my gosh, if a human being is forced to flee their country and try to get their children to safety. Having a welcome and an empathetic framework for trying to be interested, or at least understanding of their plight.

And then to imagine if you were in that situation by happenstance, right? If you happened to be born in that country at that time, and you were trying to get your children to safety, how would you like to be received on the shores of someone else's country when you get there. Right.

Robin Who: Absolutely. Yeah. It's very true. And I think those experiences then also shape the views, as you said, right? A positive experience in a different country or with somebody from that country will shape the view that you have. And so, a lot of this hatred, as you say, can come from those bad experiences or that information is like, oh, they're coming to take your jobs.

That's a big one. That's been used a lot in history. These people are coming to take your jobs. So, like, you're going to be jobless because of them, not because of economic situations or whatever other situations that may actually be the reason. And so, creating that as humans, we're very good at connecting because we're, I have that belonging, but a very good way to feel the belonging is having a common outcome and a common goal.

And sometimes a common goal, and that's the positive way that a common goal on the negative face of the coin is having a common enemy. And that is something that is very much used in order to generate this kind of hatred so strongly towards a whole population, towards a whole country, towards a whole, so many thousands of people, right?

That if you really think about it in a realistic way, you're, again, probably majority of them, good people who need help, but there's definitely a lot of misinformation. And I think it really goes back to the fact that education is power. Information is power. Kind of way to be learning as well, to see different perspectives and look at the issue or whatever, at the matter in question with different perspectives and analyzing every single aspect of it.

Matt Bowles: I think it's important to have that lens as you go into a new place and to be open and aware of what the dynamics are and what they are at the time that you're there, right? One of the places where

I've spent a bunch of time now in South Africa. And one of the dynamics that's going on in South Africa, most people are aware of apartheid.

So, they're aware of the history of colonialism and institutionalized white supremacy. And even though apartheid has officially fallen, there's there's a lot of remnants of apartheid that are still in place. And a lot of people are aware of some of the racist dynamics of that nature that are there. But when you go there, actually a lot more really complex stuff is going on there.

Such, for example, that there's a lot of African immigrants from all other African countries who are coming to South Africa to try to find work and to try to create a nice life for their families. And one of the remarkable things that you will notice when you go there if you pay attention, is that there is a fierce level of xenophobia in certain sectors.

This is not the majority of people, of course, right? But there are certain sectors in South Africa, and I'm talking about the black South African community, that are xenophobic against the black African immigrants from other African countries to the point that they are attacking them, firebombing their businesses, murdering people in the streets in some cases and things of this nature, which is the exact same narrative that we're seeing in any of these, you know, European countries or other places where they have an anti-immigrant narrative.

These people are coming here. They're not a part of our nationality. They are taking our resources, a finite number of resources. If they take Any of them were getting less for us. Therefore, we have to keep them out and prevent them from getting any of these resources. Like I was in Cape town last year and I was reading in the newspaper that two weeks before I got there, there was a demonstration, and this was not in Cape town.

It was over closer to Johannesburg area where One of these vigilante groups was doing a demonstration outside a hospital and they were trying to prevent black African immigrants who "looked foreign" or "sounded foreign" to the vigilantes, preventing them from getting in the hospital to get their treatment because there was only so much social services that were available in that country and they should be for "South African nationals only".

This stuff manifests all over the place. And so, if you have a framework, right? Like if you understand, okay, here's what's going on in Sicily, for example, right? With the anti-immigrant stuff. And here's why it's a problem. You can then go to South Africa, or you could go to anywhere else, and you could be like, oh my gosh, the exact same thing is happening here, right?

Obviously, there's a different bit of history or whatever that's kind of created a situation like this, but you will see really similar narratives. And then you will see immigrant groups that are trying their best. They were, they left their countries because there were these oldies emigration, you know, or forced migration factors that pushed them out.

They're trying to create a life for themselves and their safety for their families and everything else. And they're being met in some cases with militant hostility in the countries that they're going to and that these types of things start getting recreated all over the world. And so, I think having a framework and having a lens and having that empathy pathway open, right.

Allows you then and doing the reading, like you said, right? Like reading history and understanding this kind of stuff. For example, what we're talking about before we go to South Africa. So, I do that, and I read that and then I go. And so then how does that impact the way that I engage locally with South Africans?

Well, the first thing that I do is I realize that 95% of the Uber drivers are African immigrants from other countries outside of South Africa. So, what I'm going to do in every single Uber ride is I'm going to talk to my Uber driver and I'm going to ask them and I'm specifically ask them in the context of giving them space and a safe, supportive, comfortable space to talk about their experience.

And I'm going to say, "Hey, you know, I've heard this stuff is going on. How is it for you? How are you and your family doing here? And in light of the situation, what's it been like for you? What's your experience like?" And then they know I'm aware of it. They know I'm supportive of them and their experience, and I'm giving them a platform to talk about it.

And then they will share what their experience is and has been and so forth. And so, I will be able to connect with local folks in that way because I've done that research. I've read enough about it to know what the situation is. And then I'll be aware of the situation when I'm speaking to people, and I can have those really substantive conversations with various different local people about the reality of their situation there.

Robin Who: I do the same. I love some Uber drivers' chats. Oh my God, the things you learn, because a lot of them are immigrants in that country, a lot of them, most of the cases, or have some sort of, you know, story of immigration at some point, to be honest, in every country I've been. And then if it's not an immigrant, somebody who has a lot of stories or has stories of other people's who've been in the Uber. It's such a great place to have a good chat, but in general, I think, and this is probably the social policy kicking in for me, but for a lot of this immigration rules and the ways that the countries do, they definitely get to the point where the hatred takes over that empathy.

And I think it's also in a way connected to a misorganization of how the deal. With the amount of people, because I think, and I'm thinking about Europe and Italy and stuff. When you are not able to, let's say, be organized about the people or have a plan and a process, you are actually doing a disfavor to the people coming in.

And you get to the point that maybe you're going to end up saying you can't come in anymore, which has happened in a lot of places in the Mediterranean, actually, in general. Spain had a similar situation too. And so, you get to that point and then you have camps of refugees and so on that are overcrowded.

Sometimes they also get stuck and they're actually trying to get somewhere else, but then they get stuck there. And then you have an overcrowded number of people who are unhappy in a camp. Lots of aggression, lots of just bad negative. And then people who are from that country or so on, they just see the aftermath of all of that.

So, I think together with empathy from a policy perspective, it's really having a plan and a process that benefits both parties. And I would hope that having something like that in place for immigration, which is something that let's be realistic. We will never stop. There will always be immigration. We will always deal with immigration, refugees and so on.

So, let's learn to deal with this properly, right? So that then locals don't start to get these feelings of hatred and necessity. Having these negative associations with those people that then become, the whole nationality becomes that, and then for the people who come, they get those opportunities that they went for, or they got to the places they were intentionally going for, right?

So, from a more higher-up discussion, I think there is a big lack of that when such strong issues arise from immigration.

Matt Bowles: Robin, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round. You've now been to over 40 countries, why do you continue to travel to this point? What does travel mean to you today?

Robin Who: I'm addicted. It's an addiction guys. Start it. You'll never stop. Travel for me sometimes is not only like a way to refresh and be more creative and be, but it's also a way to just realign a moment with myself. Travel brings to me that primordial version of me, free, happy, ready to just explore that open month.

Traveling just reassessed me. Some people go to chiropractors or physiotherapists. For me, travel is that. I also do like, like a good massage, don't get me wrong. But mentally, that's what it does to me. And especially solo traveling does that to me, where I love to travel in company too. Sometimes just having even just one day or something like that, just me exploring, whatever that is, just brings me back to me, to the way I want.

As I said before, you are extrapolating yourself from this designed environment that you've been in for a while, and you're putting yourself on this blank canvas. And so, when you do that, so much happens, right? And you realign with what you want if you have nothing else to think about, which is, I think, a very hard thing to do when you're just so immersed in the daily tasks.

But yeah, I just want to keep on going and looking back and be like, oh my God, the stories, the people I met. Yeah, it's a never-ending journey.

Matt Bowles: All right, Robin, at this point, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Robin Who: I think I am. Yes.

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

Robin Who: I'm going to go Dorian Gray. Dorian Gray, in general, like Oscar Wilde and his books, there's something that triggers you then in a good way.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. Oscar Wilde is extraordinary. I can remember the very first week that I landed in Dublin for my study abroad year at Trinity College. I went to the Abbey Theatre, and I saw *The Importance of Being Earnest* performed in the Abbey Theatre and Oscar Wilde is just magnificent. So, if people have not connected with Oscar Wilde yet, that's definitely a really important thing to do.

All right, Robin, 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 pick?

Robin Who: David Attenborough. I just need to talk to this guy. Like all the animals and nature, all his documentaries are fascinating. He also has a very calming voice. So, I would say him.

Matt Bowles: All right, Robin, 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 Robin?

Robin Who: I would say keep going. I think I've always been a quite determined person. My grandma would have said stubborn, but I'll go with determined. I've always been a determined person, knowing a bit, if I want to do it, I'm going to do it, kind of thing. But at the same time, especially at that age, you may have a moment where you doubt the outcomes or you're scared of the outcomes or you're scared of making a mistake.

And that's actually something that may happen later on in life too, where you are at a crossroad, right? Like you have to choose and you're so scared. And I would just say, keep on going. I think as long as you take action that feels aligned with now, the information you have now, the who you are now, the who you think you want to become now.

It's going to lead you where you need to be. And having this fear of making mistakes, things like, oh, choosing where to go, career, whatever, right? That's, I think, a fear that is just taking up energy. It will work out. It will be good. It will be worth it. And just stick to the journey and make the best out of it.

Matt Bowles: Okay, of all the places you've now been, Robin, what are three of your favorite travel destinations you would most recommend other people should definitely check out?

Robin Who: Oh my god, this is really hard because I feel like everywhere, you should go everywhere. Everywhere your heart or you get a little itchy foot for it's so hard.

Do you see it? Like I struggle. It's like the five-year plan. I'm just like, oh, you should go everywhere. It goes everywhere. It teaches you something, but yeah, I'm going to go. I'm going to go this way. Yeah. Cambodia, Columbia, India.

Matt Bowles: All right, Robin, 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?

Robin Who: Okay. So, the three places I want to go to are Kenya, South Africa, and. and Japan in this order. The reason why is Africa, it's one of the continents together with Australia that I have in Oceania to be more precise, that I haven't been to.

Again, it's one of those stories where it's like, I know there's so much history, there's so much learning that none of the books I went through could ever explain, and nature, that's the other thing. I think it would be such a cultural experience that I can really grow from and learn. So, I'm very fascinated.

And to be honest, I would also love to do North and Africa too. But anyway, and Japan, because I've never been, I know there is a lot around there. I've always been generally fascinated with Eastern culture as well.

Matt Bowles: Well, those are actually three of my favorite countries. I've been to South Africa, Kenya, and Japan multiple times each.

And so, I'm here for you, Robin, when you're ready to plan those trips. Hit me up for sure. I want you at this point to let folks know, first of all, how they find you, follow you, and connect with you. And I also want you

to share a little bit about how people can work with you at [Our Connected World](#), what types of things you offer, and what the different opportunities are for people to come in to your world.

Robin Who: Absolutely. So, you can find me at Our Connected World. So, [Our Connected World](#). All together on Instagram, that's probably the best way to also connect with me. I always check my DMS and love to answer people there. I also do have a website, www.ourconnectedworld.ca. How Canadian of me. And then as for like ways to work with me, there's a couple.

So, the academy courses that I mentioned before. Those are like great ways, especially if you want to travel to Spain Latin America, or Italy, again, you have different options from crash courses to full-on immersion courses. If you want to work towards like fluency and that's kind of like the academy part is really about traveling and immersing yourself in those countries.

And from a travel lifestyle and really like starting to. Earn income online so that you can have the flexibility to travel as much as you want, do whatever you want, see the world, explore. That would be a great way to start. It's a 30-day program called Clarity to Freedom. What I noticed is a lot of the programs out there were missing that transition.

Helping people actually transition to having an online income, having that flexibility, and really setting everything up so that you are financially stable, A, and B, setting up the foundations in a way that what you're building is aligned with who you are, what you want to do, your skills, your passions right now, just out of nowhere, let's say, or fear of just needing to make money kind of thing.

So that's a very great place to start if you really want to embrace a travel lifestyle and really create more flexibility and freedom in your life.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. And I understand that you are willing to offer a special discount to Maverick Show listeners. We're going to link it all up in [the show notes](#), but just tell folks what can they get a discount on and how do they get it. And then they can just go to [the show notes](#) and see it there.

Robin Who: Absolutely. So of course, I'm more than happy to offer this. So, it's a 15% discount. And it's on the, uh, what's called travel to Italy or travel to Spain and Latin American courses, which include a crash course on the language, so Italian or Spanish, plus a whole travel planning course as well to help you plan safely, but also without breaking bank.

And the other one is the 30 days to clarity to freedom that I mentioned. So, this is applicable to all of these courses. And of course, I am more than excited to offer this to your audience.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. So, what we're going to do, folks, in order to get discounts, you need to use a code and you're going to enter the code **Maverick15** to get your 15% discount on any of these courses.

We're going to put the direct links and the code in [the show notes](#), and we're also going to link up to everything else that we've talked about, the books that Robin recommended, all the other stuff that we've mentioned in this interview. All of it's going to be together at one place. Just go to themaverickshow.com. Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and there you will find it.

Robin, thank you so much for coming on the show. This was amazing.

Robin Who: Thank you for having me and for giving me an aperitivo on this Friday.

Matt Bowles: There's no better way than I would have rather spent this Friday or no person I would have rather had aperitivo with.

So, thank you for sharing that with me and good night, everybody.